

# THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

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## GOD'S NAME IS "MERCY"

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Pope Francis gave an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy to the Church Universal. The Holy Year was opened on December 8, 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, and will conclude with the solemn Mass of Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, (Christ the King) on November 20, 2016.

At the heart of this Jubilee, the Pope placed the need (which we always have) to contemplate the Mystery of Mercy because it is a font of joy, of serenity, and of peace. In the Bull of Indiction, he spoke what he feels in his heart: "How I wish that the years to come may be bathed in mercy so we might go out to meet every person with God's goodness and tenderness! May the balm of mercy as a sign of the already present Kingdom of God in our midst reach to all – believers and those far off."

I have entitled this message: "God's Name Is Mercy." It is the same title used in an interview given by Pope Francis a few months ago. In that interview, the Holy Father responded to many questions about the Jubilee Year and what motivated him to proclaim it. To the question posed to him, "What is mercy to the Holy Father?" the Pope answered, "Mercy is the ID card of our God: God of Mercy, Merciful God." This expression is at one and the same time so very simple, so radical, and still so freeing.

I felt that I could not let this special year pass by without referring to it in regard to our Salesian reality because, first of all, we are the educators of a multitude of youth in our world; we are Salesian Family, bearers of a charism which is firmly rooted in the certainty that our God shows a special tenderness towards His children, for the youth of the world, and, in particular, for those who, up until today, have had fewer opportunities.

There have been hundreds and hundreds of pages written and published on the theme of mercy all around the world. My words will not give any new insight but bears a strong message: a CALL – A call to every educator and to every Consecrated Religious reiterating our fundamental task: to be authentic proclaimers of the Mercy of our God, spreading it to others by contact with us.

Before all else, we must begin from this conviction: only someone who has experienced His Mercy truly knows God. That is, only if we have felt the need of His kind and tender gaze will we be able to pass on to our children and our youth some transforming and efficacious glimmer of what we believe God is for us and for them. We cannot speak about the Mercy which God gives as if we were teachers coming to teach a lesson. We can only share our convictions and our certainty about a weak faith which, nonetheless, can give extraordinary strength.

## The Two Stars

At the same time, a Salesian heart must feel happy to know that through his or her very way of being and acting in the midst of the young, he or she has the marvelous opportunity to show concretely how God loves the young, even through our gestures of self-giving and generous service. This is just what the wisdom story called “The Two Stars” relates:

Once upon a time, there lived a very austere man, who had made a vow to touch neither food nor drink until sundown. The man knew that his sacrifice was pleasing to Heaven because every evening, on the highest mountain near the valley, there shone a luminous star, visible to all.

One day, the man decided to climb the mountain and a little boy from the village insisted upon accompanying him. Because of the heat and the strain, the two soon became thirsty. The man encouraged the little boy to drink, but he answered: “I will do so only if you drink, too!”

The poor man found himself in a very embarrassing situation: he did not want to break his vow but neither did he want to make the little one suffer from thirst. In the end, he did drink and the little boy did so, too.

That evening, the man did not dare look up to Heaven for fear that the star might have vanished.

You can imagine his surprise, then, when, after some time, he raised his eyes and saw two stars shining brightly on the mountain.

When young people feel that there are Religious and educators at their side giving their life for their happiness, as the merciful face of God made visible, they don't have need of a whole bunch of words. When they make some kind of mistake, the young person does not feel condemned but welcomed and understood just the same. In this way, even when their mistake is pointed out, they still feel they are a beloved child of God and that the merciful face of the Father shines in their life. Just as it happened in Don Bosco's life, when the young realize that we want them to be happy here and in eternity, they have a direct experience of how God loves them unconditionally.

Let us hope that this Jubilee Year continue to yield fruit even into the coming years. It is an opportunity to grow in humanity and to walk towards Peace, even when our steps sometimes seem so uncertain.

Let us continue to believe that our God accompanies us along our history even if, at times, in our freedom, we do things that seem to take us two steps backward instead of one step forward.

Despite all, my dear friends, let us allow our hearts be touched by this God whose Name is Mercy.