**GOD IS MERCIFUL**

We meet Jesus in Luke's gospel (Luke 15:1‑32), with a crowd of undesirables around him, scandalising the 'good' people who accuse him of welcoming sinners. To these good people, exemplary perhaps, but unmerciful, we owe the three parables of God's mercy: the lost sheep (15:4-7)), the lost coin (15:8-10), and the lost son (15:11-32).

Our deliberate waywardness amounts to our rejection of God's loving interest in our lives. Why God doesn't lose patience with us and let us stay lost, is his mercy. He invites us to return. More than that, he goes out of his way to come after us. We experience his mercy ourselves; he expects us to show his mercy to others. We discover his mercy through people who are merciful; we are required to become men and women of mercy ourselves.

God's mercy is seen fully revealed in Jesus. Also, the way that a person can best express the mercy of God is learnt from Jesus. We see in Jesus the face of God, as he lives mercy, and as he invites others to do the same.

Wherever Jesus found himself, he was always ready and waiting for the lost, the estranged, the insecure, uneasy, rejected, despised, resented. He didn't give his attention to those who believed themselves to be good and exemplary, but he sought out the ones who were searching for some light, or hope, or love. Some people were his favourites: the most deprived, defenceless women, children, strangers, anyone excluded from the society of 'good' people, all rejects. He never showed mercy without giving up his own advantage. His mercy was unselfish love that conquers the other person's rejection and hate.

Jesus showed beyond doubt that God takes us as he finds us, at each moment of our lives. No matter how much we have rejected him, he for his part never allows a complete rupture. He is always near at hand, ready to pardon, ready to give himself, especially in a person of mercy who pleads for us, another Christ.

God still recognises the person of mercy who is able to plead for others, the one who accepts others as they are. He invites us to give ourselves completely to the service of those people to whom we belong, and of those to whom we have chosen to belong, even at the risk of our own disadvantage.

The God of mercy considers himself well represented among us by the person who is ready to be deprived personally for the sake of his fellows. He can see beyond the weaknesses of those he lives with, beyond their failings, inconsistencies, inadequacies, jealousies, and infidelities, and he can penetrate to someone who is lovable and loved; and he presents their needs to God. That one is merciful, and where there is a person of mercy, there is God.

We know from experience that one of the hardest things in life is to forgive completely and without regret. How much happier our communities would be if we could put aside our injured pride and forgive one another wholeheartedly, if also we could give a place and new chances to those who have failed.

Luke sets the question before us: Do we really believe that God goes after every human being, day after day, with the sole intention of meeting and bringing him or her home?

Do we believe that the three parables of Luke - the Prodigal Son, the Lost Sheep, and the Lost Coin - convey the true nature of God’s love for us in Christ?

Do we believe that God searches for every human being in the same way as a shepherd does for the lost sheep?

Do we believe that God is like a father who sees his lost son from afar and goes to meet him, and that this alone gives the son the strength to go ahead and meet his father?

Can we accept such a God as the true one?

Jesus had nothing more important to say to us than that God is deeply in love with the world that he created and every creature in it and each one of us. His whole mission consists in bringing us with him to God our Father.