

for loyalty to covenant promises; like Job we remain steadfast amid tragedy, suffering, and even the silence of God.

These observations on incomparability in the scriptures lead to a final question: "Who are the incomparable people in our society and our personal lives?" In society and the Church we think of Mahatma Gandhi, Bishop Oscar Romero, or Mother Theresa. In our personal lives we think of family members, teachers, coaches, Church ministers, or friends who have been incomparable to us. "Who has been like to him/her in my life?" such persons incarnate for us the singular and incomparable beauty of the Lord and often influence our vocation.

Vocation by definition calls us to certain paths of relationship and leadership, e.g., the single state, marriage, religious life, or priesthood. Whichever the case, the Lord's incomparability remains a divine attribute, and we share in this distinction by the quality of our lives.

### Summary

Incomparability is an important motif in the scriptures, i.e., of the Lord, our extolling of the Lord, and our sharing in this attribute by the quality of our lives. Our understanding and appreciation of incomparability is often incarnated in the lives of others who serve as models of righteous living in covenant, as well as we ourselves being models for others to emulate. Incomparability informs our understanding of vocation because this rich scriptural theme encourages every generation to answer the call by remaining watchful in prayer, faithful amid failure and success, and ever singing, "Who is like to you...?" What better compliment can we give to God and offer to one another? ■



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# "He Does Not Break the Crushed Reed"

Isaiah 42:3

By Rev. Emmaneul Charles McCarthy

"It is God, who is 'rich in mercy,' whom Jesus Christ has revealed to us as Father." With these words Pope John Paul II begins what I believe to be the most eternally significant event of his pontificate, namely, the publication of the Encyclical, *Dives in Misericordia*, "Rich in Mercy." Toward the end of this encyclical the Successor of Peter proclaims that "mercy (is) the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and the Redeemer." Hence, the true God, as opposed to idols conjured up in the human psyche, is a God of Holy, Infinite and Everlasting mercy. This is good, good, good news for every human being. In fact, it is the best news any human being could hope for or imagine.

Amidst all the Christian elocutions flowing from pulpit, radio, television and audio/video tape, amidst all the high and low Christian theologizing issuing from books, journals, newspapers and the internet, it is possible for the straightforward commands of Jesus to get lost. Jesus' commission to His disciples in the last paragraph of the Gospel of Matthew could not be clearer: "Go you therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach them to obey all that I have commanded you." (Mt 28:19-20) The explicit conversion command that Jesus teaches also could not be more understandable: "I want mercy, not sacrifice." (Mt 9:13) Simpleminded and sophisticated obfuscations and distortions can be concocted to assure that the obvious will never be seen or to guarantee that what is of primary concern for Jesus is

reduced to an incidental concern for the billions to whom He has given the gift of faith. However, "I want mercy, not sacrifice," and "(T)each them to obey all that I have commanded you" will perpetually stand in judgement on such intellectual maneuvers. Those who profess faith in Jesus can discount, ignore, modify or rationalize away His teaching in order to advance their interests but His words will ever be there, inviting them back to the truth of Truth Incarnate, reminding them of the purpose for which the gift of faith was bestowed upon them.

If Jesus is as St. Paul says, "the visible image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), if the God Jesus proclaims is "rich in mercy" (Eph. 2:4), if "the Father and I are one" (Jn. 10:30), if "he who sees Me sees the Father" (Jn. 14:9), then what else could Jesus command other than, "I want mercy, not sacrifice," Mercilessness, regardless of the quality of logic, the cleverness of euphemism or the impressiveness of ritual by which it conceals and perpetuates itself, is never of God and is never a part of the economy of salvation. It is mercy that initiates and consummates the process of salvation in Christ. This is why Pope John Paul II writes in *"Dives in Misericordia"*, "Christ's messianic program, the program of mercy, becomes the program of His people, the program of the Church." This means Christ-like mercy must be the program of each baptized person without exception and without any "time-outs." "The Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy," declares the Pope. Hence, the individual Christian of whatever Church – Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant – lives an authentic

life when he or she professes and proclaims by thought, word and deed, mercy.

The Advocate, the Paraclete, the Public Defender that God in His mercy sends to this world to act on behalf of human beings is the Spirit of the Father who is rich in mercy, is the Spirit of the Son who is one with the Father, is the Spirit of the Holy, is the Spirit of Mercy. Satan, the Accuser, the Adversary of God and humanity, is *ipso facto* the spirit of mercilessness, the spirit of all that is anti-Christ. Mercilessness is from hell. Indeed, hell is a perpetual state of being confirmed in the merciless: "I was hungry and you did not give me to eat, I was thirsty and you did not give me to drink, I was naked and you did not clothe me. I was in prison and you did not visit me.", etc. (Mt. 25:31-46) This teaching of Jesus is the standard of judgment at the end of time. Mercy or mercilessness? It does not require a doctorate from Harvard Divinity School to get this straight. There is something so profoundly different between an act of mercy and an act of mercilessness in time that they fashion opposite outcomes in eternity.

Forget the anthropomorphic imagery of devils with pitchforks, etc. Fixating on images that try to describe what is beyond individual and communal human experience, and hence description, just serves to undermine the gravity of an eternal life and death mystery. Because of truths we can only get a glimpse of through the revelation of Jesus, we know that indifference to the relievable suffering of another human

being – mercilessness – is radical evil. (Mt 25:46) We also know by this same revelation that responding to the relievable suffering of another human being – mercy – results in entrance into "the Kingdom

in mercy. John Paul II in his encyclical says, "Making the Father present as love and mercy is, in Christ's own consciousness, the fundamental touchstone of His mission as the Messiah."

Faith in the self-revelation of God in Jesus is preeminent because until one knows what kind of God God is, one cannot know what God expects of those He created. Jesus teaches that God who is rich in mercy expects of those who wish to be in union with the Divine that they too be rich in mercy. A God who is Father of each person expects human beings to relate to each other not as capitalists to communists, not as Americans to Iraqis, not as have's to have-not's, not as Croats to Serbs, not as the righteous to the sinners, not as Pilate to Jesus, but as brothers and sisters endeavoring to assist each other in being merciful as Christ is merciful, in being merciful as their Father in heaven is merciful, in being helpers of one another on The Way of Mercy that leads to everlasting life for one and all.

In *Dives in Misericordia* John Paul II emphatically states that, "Mercy constitutes the fundamental content of the messianic message of Christ and the constitutive power of His mission." Now if mercy is the essential teaching and power of Jesus' mission, if

mercy is His conversion demand, if mercy is the standard of judgment at the end of the world, if mercy is the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and Redeemer, is it conceivable that a Christian, someone who truly has faith in Jesus as their Lord, God and Savior, would set aside mercy even if he or she could gain the whole world or



*Drawing by Kristin McCarthy: "Christ the Executed."*

prepared for you since the foundation of the world." (Mt 25:34)

Providing a person first has faith in Jesus as his/her Lord, God and Savior, this makes sense. Jesus reveals to us that God is a Father who is rich in mercy. Reason may be able to tell us God exists but only revelation can tell us God is a Parent rich

some paltry piece thereof? Would it not be ludicrous for a believer in Christ to even entertain such a thought? Would it not be tragic unseriousness to engage in un-Christ-like mercilessness and then try to pacify one's soul and fool God by the crafty renaming of mercilessness as "mercy?" "If our hopes in Christ are limited to this life only, we are the most pitiable of people," says St. Paul. (1 Co. 15:19) For the Christian to live in time as if eternity did not exist would be ill advised. For a Christian to choose mercilessness rather than mercy, in order to gain the totally perishable, would be spiritual insanity.

State laws authorizing the homicidal violence of the death penalty and under which Christians reasonably destroy others in clear conscience can be accredited or discredited depending on one's use of reason. What philosophy builds up, philosophy can tear down. As one of the most renowned Catholic Biblical Scholars of the Twentieth Century, the late Rev. John L. McKenzie, noted on many occasions, the Church has no commission from Jesus to teach philosophy. This means that the place of reason in the Christian life is to figure out how to implement the teachings of Jesus, not to figure out how to modify them, ignore them, dismiss them, undermine them or abandon them. Now if Jesus teaches His followers, "I want mercy, not sacrifice," if Jesus teaches His followers, "Be merciful as your Heavenly Father is merciful," if as Pope John Paul II says, "Mercy constitutes the fundamental content of the Messianic Message of Christ and the constitutive power of His mission," then for what purpose should reason be employed by the Christian and by the Church? To rationalize mercilessness into mercy? To legitimize the substitution of some philosophy of justified mercilessness, devised by a fellow lump of clay, for the revealed teachings of Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ? St. Paul's warning to the Church in Rome is pertinent here: "The more they call themselves philosophers, the more stupid they grew, until they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for a worthless imitation."

(Rm. 1:22,23)

What cannot be denied is that in each instance of that form of homicidal violence called capital punishment the spirit of mercilessness reigns, albeit under the disguise of mercy in such gestures of pseudo-compassion as a generous "last meal." This is only mercilessness with manners. The truth is that the spirit that entered history through Cain and did its most horrific work on Calvary is the same spirit that enters state death chambers, envelopes guillotines and laughs cacophonously at God as an infinitely loved son or daughter of the Father is burnt to death at the stake or in an electric chair. Is it the same spirit that acts through non-legalized killers when they take the lives of others? You bet it is! It is the perverted and perverting spirit of mercilessness, manifest as homicidal violence, that is at the root of all this destruction, legal or illegal, reasonable or unreasonable, sordid or romantic. John Paul II wrote in his Encyclical, *Rich in Mercy*, that, "(T)he genuine face of mercy has to be ever revealed anew." Is the Face of the Father who is rich in mercy, the Face of Mercy, revealed today by those Christians, whether they be presidents, governors, legislators, judges, wardens, guards or citizens, who promote, operate or profit from the various state death chambers?

The blood on Jesus' hands is His own. Capital punishment is not what Jesus taught, it is what He suffered. Crucifying, gassing, beheading, hanging, shooting, electrocuting and poisoning people are not deeds of mercy. The God who is rich in mercy is never glorified by homicidal violence. "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition," "Praise the Lord and fire-up Old Sparky," "Praise the Lord and turn on the gas," "Praise the Lord and release the poison," "Praise the Lord and start the suction machine" are blasphemous falsehoods if Jesus is Lord. Their source is the "Father of lies who is a murderer from the beginning" and not the "Father who is rich in mercy." These are the works and words of the Adversary of mercy, the Accuser of Christ, masquerading as a Divine cheerleader for homicide. Indeed, whatever the Anti-Christ may be, its

hallmark will be mercilessness – more than likely an exquisitely rational and an acutely practical mercilessness gilded with a spell-binding veneer of pseudo-holiness.

The death penalty for Christians is not primarily a matter of politics. It is a matter of the morality taught by the Son of God as the Will of God. It is a matter of that life which outlasts time. If Jesus is only a philosopher, then rejecting the risks of mercy in favor of power, pleasure, nationalism, religionism, comfort, some political philosophy, etc. is a rational option. But, if Jesus is the definitive revelation of God and God's will to humanity, then rejecting the risks of mercy is spiritual suicide. This is not about politics, it is about "a good defense before the awesome judgment seat of Christ." (Byzantine Divine Liturgy) Here again perhaps, St. Paul is pertinent when he warns the Church in Corinth with these words: "As Scripture says, 'I shall destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the learning of the learned. Where are the philosophers now?'" (1 Co. 1:19-20) Where are the philosophers of justified mercilessness now?

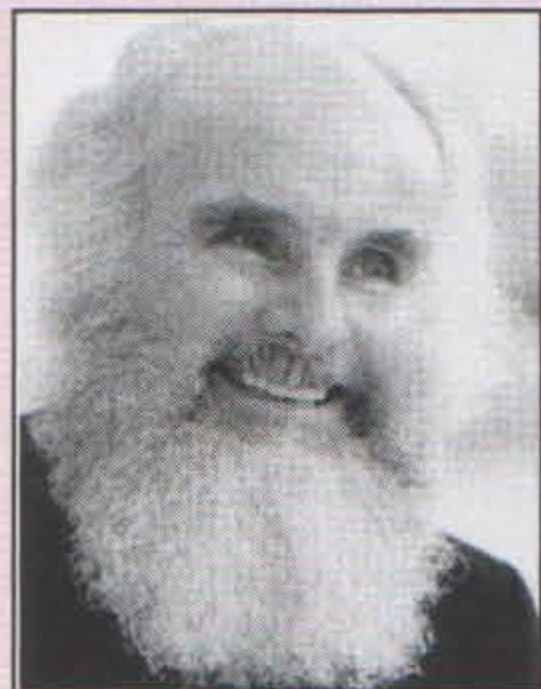
No one is sinless, but all are sacred. No one is going to come to his or her last breath praying, "God, have justice on me!" But, if it is mercy we desire from God in the after-life, is it not mercy we should offer to others in this life? "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" is either meaningless babble into infinite emptiness or it is a request that God judge us as we have judged others. Jesus says, "*Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.*" (Mt. 5:7) And, what does He say the fruits of mercilessness will be? (Mt. 25:45-46; Lk. 16:19)

Christians must cease endorsing and participating in capital punishment because it is blatantly incompatible with following the Nonviolent Jesus of the Gospels and His Way of nonviolent love of friends and enemies. Christians must discontinue advocating and justifying capital punishment because it is in direct violation of that "new commandment" (Jn. 13:34) of Jesus which the Catechism of the Catholic Church (sec. 1970) says

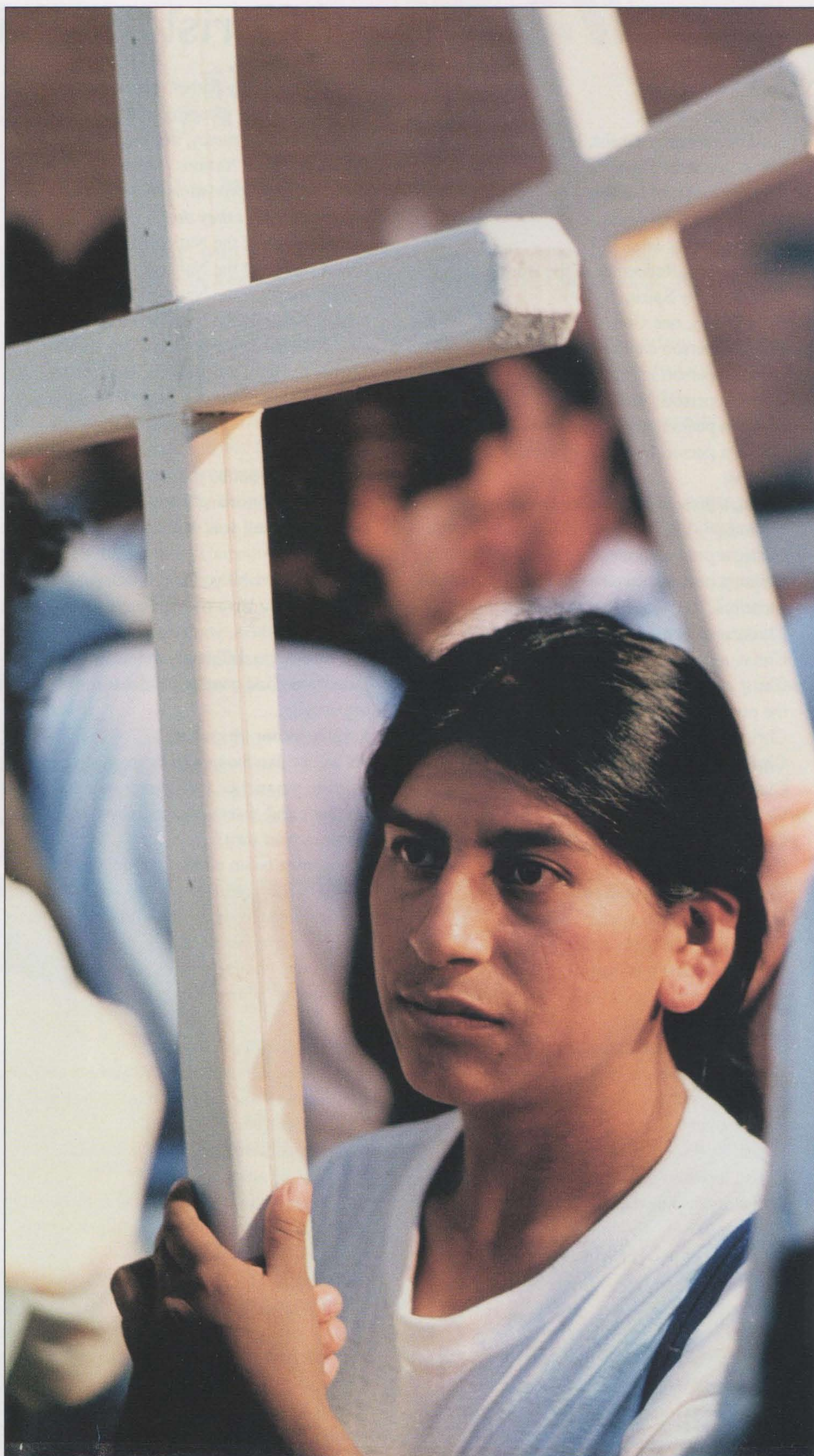
“contains the entire law of the Gospel”: “I give you a new commandment, love one another as I have loved you.” (Jn. 13:34; Jn. 15:12) As a person cannot imagine Jesus burning witches at the stake, he or she equally cannot imagine Him gassing, shooting, guillotining, electrocuting, poisoning or crucifying human beings. What Christians cannot see Christ doing, they are forbidden to do. Christians must halt all active support of capital punishment because by their support they bear false witness to other Christians and to the non-Christian world and thereby become obstacles to people coming to Jesus and knowing the one and only true God. By bearing false witness such Christians, who were chosen to be instruments of the merciful healing power of Jesus Christ, become instead agents of the pandemic of organized mercilessness that is spreading throughout global humanity. Finally, Christians regardless of rank, status, class or occupation must abandon capital punishment because they were created from Mercy for Mercy and in Jesus they have been granted the gift of knowing that the way to Mercy beyond time is by the Way of Mercy in time. Regardless of what other faiths or philosophies may say, Christians are commanded by Jesus to ever reveal the Face of Mercy to humanity. This they can accomplish only by following the Way of Jesus, their Nonviolent Suffering Servant Messiah, who in His mercy “does not break the crushed reed.”

Let us leave the final word on the death penalty to a victim of capital punishment, St. Edith Stein, who was recently declared by Pope John Paul II the Patroness of Europe: “It is mercy that makes us one with God.” ■

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*Jesus was condemned to die and therefore the cross is a strong sign.*

# Litany of Christ the Prisoner

℣: Lord, have mercy.

℞: Christ, have mercy.

℣: Lord, have mercy. Christ, hear us.

℞: Christ graciously hear us.

℣: God the father of heaven,

Repeat after each invocation:

**Have mercy on us (me).**

God the Son, Redeemer of the world,

God the Holy Spirit,

Holy Trinity, one God,

Christ, a person captured,

Christ, a person interrogated,

Christ, a person jailed,

Christ, a person prosecuted,

Christ, a person found guilty by the judicial process,

Christ, a person judged unrighteous by the virtuous,

Christ, a person condemned by the people,

Christ, a person proved wrong by His superiors,

Christ, a person convicted by the law,

Christ, a person rendered powerless,

Christ, a person denounced by the agents of the powerful,

Christ, a person stripped of all clothing,

Christ, a person pushed and shoved,

Christ, a person insulted,

Christ, a person ridiculed,

Christ, a person mocked,

Christ, a person beaten,

Christ, a person brutalized,

Christ, a person taunted,

Christ, a person tormented,

Christ, a person tortured,

Christ, a person humiliated,

Christ, a person regarded as expendable,

Christ, a person abandoned,

Christ, a person abused by His fellow prisoners,

Christ, a person understood by no one,

Christ, a person called criminal,

Christ, a person crushed,

Christ, a person executed,

Christ, a person who failed,

Christ, a victim of the state's violence and justice.

℣: Blessed are the merciful

℞: For they shall obtain mercy

℣: Happy are they who practice mercy

℞: For they need not fear the day of death or judgment.

℣: Be merciful

℞: As your Heavenly Father is merciful.

℣: Go and learn the meaning of the words:

℞: "What I want is mercy, not sacrifice."

℣: Christ, Judge of Nations' Judges,

Repeat after each invocation: **Forgive them for they know not what they do.**

Christ, Judge of the Nations' Pharisees,

Christ, Judge of the Nations' Caiaphases,

Christ, Judge of the Nations' Pilates,

Christ, Judge of the Nations' Herods,

Christ, Judge of the Nations' Governors,

Christ, Judge of the Nations' Centurians,

Christ, Judge of the Nations' Caesars,

℣: Do not judge

℞: And you will not be judged.

℣: Lord, how often must I forgive? Seven times?

℞: Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-times-seven times.

℣: So no matter who you are, if you pass judgment you have no excuse.

℞: In judging others, you condemn yourself since you behave no differently than those who judge you. God condemns that sort of behavior impartially.

℣: Forgive us our trespasses

℞: As we forgive those who trespass against us.

℣: Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's and sister's eye and never notice the plank in your own?

℞: There must be no passing of judgment: leave that until the Lord comes – He will light up all that is hidden in the dark and reveal the secret intentions of each heart.

℣: Let the one who is without sin

℞: cast the first stone.

℣: Christ, liberator of Barabas,

Repeat after each invocation: **Remember us (me).**

Christ, proclaimer of prison as a place of universal judgment,

Christ, proclaimer of prison as a place of universal salvation,

Christ, proclaimer of liberty to captives,

Christ, proclaimer of freedom to prisoners,

Christ, model for living,

Christ, model for suffering,

Christ, model for dying,

Christ, a person kind toward the unkind,

Christ, a person compassionate toward the powerful,

Christ, a person understanding of the insulter,

Christ, a person forgiving of the tormentor,

Christ, a person merciful toward the abuser,

Christ, a person praying for the executioners,  
Christ, a person helpful to fellow prisoners,  
Christ, a servant of the suffering and Suffering  
Servant,  
Christ, a lamb among wolves,

℣: Lamb of God, You Who take away the sins of the world,

℞: Spare us, O Lord.

℣: Lamb of God, You Who take away the sins of the world,

℞: Graciously hear us, O Lord.

℣: Lamb of God, You Who take away the sins of the world,

℞: Have mercy on us.

℣: Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom.

℞: I promise you, this day you will be with me in paradise.

**Let us be attentive:**

*A reading from The New Testament (Ephesians 4:1-6)*

**Wisdom:**

"I, a prisoner in the Lord, implore you therefore to lead a life worthy of your vocation. Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together. There is one Body, one spirit, just as you were all called into one and the same hope when you were called. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is Abba of all, over all, through all and within all."

℣: Let us pray to the Lord.

℞: Lord have mercy.

"Christ, eternal Son of God and eternal Brother of all prisoners, help me to live my life in my prison in Your Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Love. Help me to see hostility, meanness and indifference toward me as an opportunity to freely love, live, give and forgive. Help me therefore always to be kind, always to be compassionate and always to be merciful and thereby place Your Love, which is Your Presence and Power, where only I can place It in this universe of immeasurable time, space, misery, mercy and mystery. Amen."

Through the Mercy of our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ May we (I) be reduced to Love. Amen. Amen. Amen.

*By Fr. Emmanuel C. McCarthy*