

Children of the Lord  
(On Love 1<sup>2</sup>)

In Nazareth, before his own townspeople, Christ referred to the words of the prophet Isaiah: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' In these phrases, Christ made his first declaration of his mission as Messiah. And in St Luke's gospel, they're followed by the actions and words of Jesus making the Father present among people. It's very significant that the people in question are especially the poor, those without means of subsistence, those deprived of their freedom, the blind who cannot see the beauty of creation, those living with broken hearts or suffering from social injustice, and (finally) sinners. For these last, especially, the Messiah is a particularly clear sign of God who is love, a sign of the Father. And it's in this visible sign too that people of our own time, just like the people then, can see the Father. | When messenger sent by John the Baptist came to ask Jesus: 'Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?' it's significant that he answered by referring to the same testimony that he gave at Nazareth: "So and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them." And he then ended with the words: 'And blessed is he who takes no offense at me.' Through his actions and his life-style, Jesus revealed that love is present in the world in which

we live - an effective love, a love that addresses itself to humankind and embraces everything that makes up our humanity: a love that's particularly noticed in contact with suffering, injustice and poverty, in contact with the whole historical 'human condition' which in various ways shows up our limitations and frailties, physical and moral. The mode and sphere in which love shows itself is precisely what "mercy" means, in the language of the Bible. So: Christ reveals God who is Father, who is Love (as St John wrote in his 1<sup>st</sup> Letter): Christ reveals God as "rich in mercy" (as St Paul put it). And this truth isn't just the subject of a teaching, but a reality made present to us by Christ. Making the Father present as love and mercy is fundamental to Christ's mission as the Messiah: it's there in the words He used first in the synagogue at Nazareth, and later in the presence of his own disciples and the messengers from John the Baptist. Jesus made mercy one of the main themes of his preaching, teaching first "in parables" which express better the very essence of things... the Prodigal Son parable, the Good Samaritan and (by contrast) the merciless servant. Then there's the Good Shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep, the woman sweeping the house in search of a lost coin. It's St Luke's gospel which particularly treats these themes of Christ's teaching, and so has earned the title of "the Gospel of mercy".

Think over this aspect of mercy in the gospel, in your prayer today, and as we listen now to a prayer for mercy, the Kyrie from Messe Solenne by Jean Langlais

At the very beginning of the New Testament, in St Luke's Gospel two voices forcefully echo the whole Old Testament tradition about the mercy of God. Mary entering the house of Zechariah magnifies the Lord with all her soul for "his mercy" which from generation to generation is bestowed on those who fear him. She proclaims the mercy which he, who has chosen her, holds "in remembrance" from all time. Afterwards, in the same house, when John the Baptist is born, his father Zechariah blesses the God of Israel and glorifies him for performing the mercy promised to our fathers, and for remembering his holy covenant. In the teaching of Christ himself, this image inherited from the Old Testament becomes at once both simpler and more profound. It's most evident in the 'Prodigal Son' parable. The word "mercy" doesn't appear there, but the parable expresses the essence of the divine mercy in a particularly clear way, because of the parallel that lets us understand more fully the mystery of mercy as a drama played out between the father's love and the prodigality and sin of the son, in the story. That son is, in a certain sense, everyone throughout history, beginning with the one who was first to lose the inheritance of grace and original justice. The parable indirectly touches on every breach of the covenant of love, every loss of grace, every sin. And the parallel turns clearly towards interior things of the human person: more important than the material goods of his inheritance is the son's deignity as a son in his father's house... and this, in the story, is his greater loss, humiliation and shame: the loss of that deignity that springs from the relationship of the son with the father.