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Mercy drives us to transform the world and history

Mercy saves, and its missionary impulse transforms the world and history, affirmed the Holy Father during the catechesis of today's general audience, held in St. Peter's Square and attended by over 25,000 people. The Pope commented on the reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew, which narrates the episode in which the imprisoned John the Baptist sends the disciples to Jesus to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?", recalling that the Precursor anxiously awaited the coming of the Messiah and in his preaching he had described him colourfully, "like a judge who would have finally established the Kingdom of God and purified His people, rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked". However, "Jesus began His public ministry in a very different style, and John wanted to know if He was truly the Messiah, or if he should await another".

Francis continued, "At first Jesus' answer did not correspond to the Baptist's expectations. Indeed, Jesus said, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me'. ... He answers that he is the concrete instrument of the mercy of the Father, Who reaches out to all bringing consolation and salvation, and in this way expresses God's judgement".

The message to the Church from this episode in the life of Christ is very clear. God did not send His Son into the world to punish sinners, nor to annihilate the wicked. Instead he offers them the invitation to convert so that, seeing the signs of divine goodness, they are able to find the path back to Him. "The justice that the Baptist places at the centre of his preaching is expressed in Jesus primarily as mercy. And the Precursor's doubts preempt the disquiet that Jesus subsequently elicits by His actions and His words. ... Scandal means 'obstacle'. Jesus therefore warns of a particular danger: if his works of mercy are the main obstacle to believing, this means that there is a false image of the Messiah. Blessed instead are those who, before Christ's gestures and words, render glory to the Father in heaven".

"Jesus' warning remains relevant", the Pope emphasised. "Today too humanity constructs images of God that prevent us from appreciating His real presence. Some offer a 'do-it-yourself' faith that reduces God to the limited spaces of our own desires and convictions. But this faith is not conversion to the Lord that is revealed; on the contrary, it prevents us from challenging our life and our conscience. Others reduce God to a false idol, using His holy name to justify the pursuit of interests or even hatred and violence. For others, God is merely a

psychological refuge for seeking reassurance in difficult moments, a faith wrapped up in itself and impermeable to the merciful love of Jesus that drives us towards our brothers. Others consider Christ simply as a good teacher of ethics, one among many in history. Finally, there are those who suffocate faith in a purely intimist relationship with Jesus, annulling its missionary drive that is able to transform the world and history. The Christian believes in the God of Jesus Christ, and his wish is that of growing in the living experience of His mystery of love”.

The bishop of Rome concluded his catechesis by urging those present not to place any obstacle to the Father’s merciful action, and asking for “the gift of great faith so as to become signs and instruments of mercy”.
