

LUX EDMUNDI: RELECTION: DECEMBER, 2015

The Jubilee of Mercy commences on Tuesday, 8th December, 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the 50th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council. Noting that the Hebrew word "*hesed*" occurs about 250 times in the Old Testament, the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* adds: "No one English term corresponds precisely to the Hebrew ... and the exact nuances of the term have been much debated". It has, in fact, been variously translated as "merciful kindness", "loving-kindness" "steadfast love", "faithful love", "covenanted love". It was translated in the Septuagint – a Greek version of the Hebrew Bible pre-dating the birth of Christ - as "*eleos*" and this, in turn, was rendered "*miser cordia*" in the Vulgate – the Latin version made by St. Jerome in the fourth century, which remained *the* Bible in the West for the following millennium plus. In English translations of the Vulgate – such as the Douai/Rheims version and the Knox version – it is given as "mercy". However translated, "*hesed*" bespeaks a God "rich in mercy (*Eph* 2:4)", "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (*Ex* 34:6)"

We are required to be merciful as God is merciful (cf. *Lk* 6:36), to show towards our neighbour the "*hesed*" that our Father in Heaven shows to us. The medieval exegetes noted that the Latin word, *miser cordia*, seemed to combine two other Latin words, *miseria* (misery) and *cor* (heart). Pondering all three words, they concluded that the virtue of mercy was that by which the human heart was touched by the neighbour's misery and so induced to remedy her/his defects and afflictions. Some – e.g., St. Thomas Aquinas – intimated that it was, in fact, our sense of our own vulnerability to those very same hurts and losses that compelled us to help the neighbour in distress. It was, in effect, this capacity to identify with the afflictions and deprivations of others that resulted in our "sym-pathy", "com-passion", our "suffering-with" others, and moved us to engage in works of mercy.

As our catechisms have indicated for centuries (see, e.g., *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults*), there are Seven Corporal (p. 551), and Seven Spiritual (p. 569), Works of Mercy. In the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (*Mt* 25: 31-46), the Judge welcomes those who did, and banishes those who did not, perform the Corporal Works of Mercy. "As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me". This revelation exercised the European imagination for centuries and, in painting and writing, *exemplum* and folk-tale, it was impressed on all that to feed and clothe the needy was to feed and clothe the Lord himself. In his enormously influential *Life* of St. Martin of Tours, Sulpicius Severus recounts the incident that became paradigmatic in this context: Martin cuts his soldier's cloak in two, giving one half to a freezing beggar, only to see in a vision that night the Saviour himself wrapped in the that very same garment, announcing that Martin had so clothed him.

The faithful who educated the poor for the sake of the Gospel in the age of Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice were convinced that what they did to others, especially to the child "oppressed by poverty and injustice", they did to Christ. Christ still endures afflictions and deprivations of many kinds in young people today. These are his members and are – or ought to be - our students. What we do for, and to, them, we do for, and to, the Lord. There will, no doubt, be other ways – e.g., during Catholic Schools Week 2016 – in which we will mark the Year of Mercy. Let us who strive to teach the young in the charism, and after the example, of Blessed Edmund mark it by expressly confessing every single day of this Jubilee Year our conviction that what we do to this pupil or that, we do to Christ.