

THE MERCY OF REDEMPTION

Conceived of as a collective category comprising the salvific work done by Jesus Christ, ‘redemption’ encompasses its particular consequences, among them justification and salvation.⁴ In the strict sense, however, the term ‘redemption’ denotes ‘nullification of sin.’ It designates liberation from the slavery of sin, which was accomplished through the expiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ and his ‘purchasing’ the redeemed for God. “The redemptive power of suffering is in love.”⁵ Everything that follows—justification, entering into the New Covenant, the gift of new life and new dignity—is only successive consequences of the fundamental grace granted to the humanity through the sacrifice of Jesus and his ‘gift’ of the cross, which was tantamount to liberating man from the slavery of sin. All these consequences of the sacrifice of Christ are a source of a new hope for humanity. “Could not one find here the answer which humanity awaits today? It can be received only from Christ crucified, the holy one who suffers. He can penetrate the heart of the most painful human problems, because he already stands beside all who suffer and who ask him for an awakening of new hope.”⁶

In the succeeding part of the article, three aspects and meanings of the issue of redemption will be analyzed, the main focus being its sense of victory over

⁴ See J o h n P a u l II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, March 4, 1979 (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979), Sections 7, 8, and 9.

⁵ J o h n P a u l II, “The Meaning of Suffering in the Light of Christ’s Passion” (General Audience, Vatican, Wednesday, November 9, 1988), Section 2, <http://www.totus2us.com/teaching/jpii-catechesis-on-jesus-christ/the-meaning-of-suffering-in-the-light-of-christs-passion>.

⁶ *Ibidem*, Section 8.

sin and death, as well as reconciliation with the Father, or reestablishment of the bond destroyed by sin.

MERCY IS LOVE WHICH CONQUERS SIN

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that the obedience of Jesus to his Father, manifested in his acceptance of the work of redemption, was his response to the Father's redemptive love for his people. Thus the formulation we find in the *Catechism*... prompts the conclusion that it was God the Father who initiated the work of redemption and that God's design took the shape of redemptive love.⁷ This "merciful love"⁸—as John Paul II described it—is revealed by the Son of God. "Indeed this Redemption is the ultimate and definitive revelation of the holiness of God, who is the absolute fullness of perfection: fullness of justice and of love, since justice is based on love, flows from it and tends towards it,"⁹ we read in *Dives in Misericordia*. A deeper insight into the holiness of God will enable a discovery of the fundamental implication of redemption.

According to *Dives in Misericordia*, the holiness of God is manifested in that man can 'partake' of God. It is manifested in God's being 'for' man. A grave obstruction, however, in man's relationship with God is sin. Therefore, redemption above all shows man the essence and nature of sin. The encyclical on the Divine Mercy defines sin negatively, namely, by describing what sin is not, as well as points to ways to overcome it. Among other things, we read that sin undermines the "creative power in man."¹⁰ Redemption restores this power and retrieves man's access to the fullness of life, making the holiness that comes from God again available to man. In the entire history of salvation, it is sin that has been the root of all evil and the cause of death.¹¹ Sin manifests man's rejection of God's fatherly love and denotes a breach of God's covenant with man.¹² It is due to sin that God's love cannot be revealed in any way other than mercy which removes all imperfection and misery.¹³

⁷ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003, Sections 604–609 (https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM)).

⁸ J o h n P a u l I I, *Dives in Misericordia*, Section 3.

⁹ Ibidem, Section 7.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Ibidem, Section 8.

¹² See J o h n P a u l I I, *Redemptor Hominis*, Section 9.

¹³ See Antoni S ł o m k o w s k i, "Miłosierdzie Boże w paschalnym misterium," in "*Bo na wieki Jego miłosierdzie*" (*Ps 135*): Ks. Michał Sopoćko o miłosierdziu Bożym, ed. Tomasz Bielski, vol. 2, *Powołanie człowieka* (Poznań and Warszawa: Pallottinum, 1972), 167. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.