This booklet includes five Bible studies on the parables of mercy found in Luke’s Gospel. They are designed as formation sessions for groups in parishes to be used in Lent or at any other time during the Year of Mercy. Each study also includes quotations from the Papal Bull - Misericordiae Vultus (MV) which connects to the theme of the parable.


The aims of the sessions are: to raise awareness of what God’s mercy means in each parable; to reflect on how this applies to our own lives and to consider what action we can take to show mercy and deepen our relationship with God. These sessions can be led by clergy or an appropriate lay person. The answers to the questions on the Scripture passages are at the back of the booklet.
The Good Samaritan –

Opening prayer
Dear Lord, through the story of the Good Samaritan, you teach us about compassion and mercy. As we travel through life’s journey, we meet all kinds of people, many in need of your help. We ask you to open our hearts to your tender love and compassion and help us to follow your example of showing mercy to the stranger. Amen

Leader
Just before the story of the Good Samaritan, a religious leader asks Jesus to tell him what it means to love one’s neighbour. So Jesus tells this famous parable with the aim of teaching who our neighbour is but also teaches us about the true nature of love and mercy.

Opening question
Think of a time when you experienced love or mercy from someone which was expressed in a practical way. What was it like to be loved in this way? (Share responses)

Scripture

25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 He said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read?” 27 And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.” 28 And he said to him, “You have answered right; do this, and you will live.”

29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” 30 Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, 34 and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 And the next day he took out two denarii\(^{[c]}\) and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ 36 Which of these three, do you think, proved a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?” 37 He said, “The one who showed mercy on him.” And Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”
Discussion questions
(See back of booklet for answers)

1. If you were the lawyer, what thoughts and feelings might you have after Jesus tells this parable in response to your question “Who is my neighbour?”

2. Describe the Samaritan’s actions from the point of view of (a) personal inconvenience, (b) financial cost, (c) risk (See verses 34 & 35).

3. Christ’s question in verse 36 was not intended to prove that Samaritans could be better neighbours than Jews. What was he getting at? What did Jesus mean when he said: “Go and do likewise”?

Quotations from Misericordiae Vultus (The Face of Mercy).

Members of the group can read these out, then ask the discussion questions. (The numbers at the beginning of the quotations refer to the paragraph numbers in the Bull. A download of the full text can be found on bemerciful.co.uk).

1. Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him. The Father, “rich in mercy” (Eph. 2:4), after having revealed his name to Moses as “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ex34:6), has never ceased to show, in various ways throughout history, his divine nature. In the “fullness of time” (Gal 4:4), when everything had been arranged according to his plan of salvation, he sent his only Son into the world, born of the Virgin Mary, to reveal his love for us in a definitive way... Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions, and his entire person reveals the mercy of God.

2. We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.

Discussion question

1. What is Pope Francis urging us to do from his words?
2. In what practical ways can we ‘go and do likewise’ today?

Closing prayers

In a time of quiet, ask people to bring to mind someone they may know who is in need of God’s love and mercy and ask for God’s blessing. Finish with the Year of Mercy Prayer.
The Lost Sheep -
Luke 15:1-7 – Mercy and evangelisation

Opening prayer
Dear Lord, in the story of the lost sheep you show us that you care for each and everyone of us and that you do not want any of us to be far from your heart. Just as you will always seek us out, help us to listen to your voice when we go astray and to seek a way back to you. Help us also to be aware of others who have strayed and help us to guide them back to you. Thank you for your love and mercy. Amen.

Leader
In this Gospel story we can see a picture of the love and mercy that the Lord Jesus has for the lost. It reminds us today to be thankful for the mercy we have been freely given.

Opening question
Think of a time when you have lost or misplaced something valuable to you. How did you feel? (Share responses)

Scripture
Read the passage Luke 15:1-7

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

3 So he told them this parable: 4 “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.’ 7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.
Discussion questions
1. Why is losing the sheep a problem?
2. How do you account for the intense reaction of the shepherd to his loss?
3. Why is there great rejoicing in heaven?

Quotations from Misericordiae Vultus

Members of the group can read these out, then ask the discussion questions.

9. In the parables devoted to mercy, Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a Father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy. We know these parables well, three in particular: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the father with two sons (cf. Lk 15:1-32). In these parables, God is always presented as full of joy, especially when he pardons. In them we find the core of the Gospel and of our faith, because mercy is presented as a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love and bringing consolation through pardon.

10. Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church’s very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. The Church “has an endless desire to show mercy”. Perhaps we have long since forgotten how to show and live the way of mercy. The temptation, on the one hand, to focus exclusively on justice made us forget that this is only the first, albeit necessary and indispensable step. But the Church needs to go beyond and strive for a higher and more important goal. On the other hand, sad to say, we must admit that the practice of mercy is waning in the wider culture. In some cases the word seems to have dropped out of use. However, without a witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if sequestered in a barren desert. The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope.

Discussion question
1. What is Pope Francis urging us to do from these words?
2. In what practical ways can we work in partnership with God to gather in the lost sheep in our own lives?

Closing prayers
In a time of quiet, ask people to bring to mind someone they know who is distant from God. It may be appropriate to light a candle for each person lost. Ask for God’s blessing and pray for them to come home. Finish with the Year of Mercy Prayer.
The Prodigal Son -
Luke 15: 11-32 – Merciful like the Father

Opening prayer
You, O Lord, are a God who takes away iniquity and pardons sin, who does not hold your anger forever, but are pleased to show mercy. You, Lord, will return to us and have pity on your people. You will trample down our sins and toss them into the depths of the sea (Micah, 7:18-19).

Leader
This is surely one of the most beautiful stories ever written! It has been celebrated on stage, in art and music, and most significantly, it has been relived in countless lives and families. Luke has so exquisitely rendered the feelings of the father and his sons that we are immediately drawn into the drama of this very human situation.

It is the story of a father who had two sons. He lost them both, one in a foreign country, the other behind a barricade of self-righteousness. Popularly known as the parable of the prodigal son, a more appropriate title might be the ‘parable of the forgiving father’, because the focus of the story is primarily on the father’s love and mercy toward his children.

Opening question
Have there been times in your own life when you have felt ‘lost’ or distant from God? What was that experience like? Think of a time when you experienced love from someone which was expressed in a practical way. What was it like to be loved in this way? (Share responses)

Scripture

11 And he said, “There was a man who had two sons; 12 and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.’ And he divided his living between them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. 15 So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would gladly have fed on [a] the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ 19 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 20 And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 21 But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; 22 and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; 23 for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to make merry. 24 “Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 25 And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. 26 And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has
received him safe and sound. But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!’ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

Discussion questions:
1. Jesus is teaching this parable to the Pharisees. How might the Pharisees and teachers of the law have felt about each of the actions of the younger son? (verses 13-16). How might the Pharisees have expected the father to respond when the son returned home?
2. What do the details in verses 20-24 reveal about the love and mercy of our Father in heaven? How does this help us to be fully accepted by God?
3. Jesus could have finished the story in verse 24 but he goes on to describe the reaction of the older son (verses 25-32). What was the point Jesus was making?

Quotations from Misericordiae Vultus

9. Jesus affirms that mercy is not only an action of the Father; it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are. In short, we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us. Pardoning offences becomes the clearest expression of merciful love, and for us Christians it is an imperative from which we cannot excuse ourselves. At times, how hard it seems to forgive! And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully. Let us therefore heed the Apostle’s exhortation: “Do not let the sun go down on your anger” (Eph. 4:26). Above all, let us listen to the words of Jesus who made mercy an ideal of life and a criterion for the credibility of our faith: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt 5:7): the beatitude to which we should particularly aspire in this Holy Year.

15. In this Holy Year, we look forward to the experience of opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society: fringes which modern society itself creates. How many uncertain and painful situations there are in the world today! How many are the wounds borne by the flesh of those who have no voice because their cry is muffled and drowned out by the indifference of the rich! During this Jubilee, the Church will be called even more to heal these wounds, to assuage them with the oil of consolation, to bind them with mercy and cure them with solidarity and vigilant care.

Discussion question
1. What is Pope Francis urging us to do from these words?
2. How can this parable motivate us to love those who are lost?

Closing prayer
In a time of quiet, put yourself into the story of the lost son. What thoughts and feelings do you have as you take in God’s love? Thank God for his merciful, compassionate love for you and for all people. Finish with the Year of Mercy Prayer.
Opening prayer
Father, thank you for your great love for each of us and particularly for those suffering in poverty and deprivation. Help us to follow the example of Jesus your Son and serve those in need. In your name we pray. Amen.

Leader
This parable told by Jesus reminds us that suffering in this life can be replaced by bliss in the next but Christ also calls us to serve those in need. Christianity does not teach passive suffering in the face of injustice and oppression.

Opening question
Have you ever been asked for money from a street person? How did you react? (Share responses)

Scripture

19 “There was a rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, full of sores, 21 who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried; 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.’ 25 But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ 27 And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house, 28 for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ 29 But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ 30 And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ 31 He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’

Discussion questions:
1. How does the parable reveal the rich man’s lack of concern and mercy for Lazarus? (verses 19-21) How do you account for his indifference?
2. How does the parable contrast the state of the two men before their death, at their burial and after their death?
3. What is the one thing Abraham asks the rich man to do and why? (v.25) Why does God not send messengers from the dead to warn us? (v. 31)
Quotations from Misericordiae Vultus

15. It is my burning desire that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God’s mercy. Jesus introduces us to these works of mercy in his preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as his disciples. Let us rediscover these corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. And let us not forget the spiritual works of mercy: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead.

16. In the Gospel of Luke, we find another important element that will help us live the Jubilee with faith. Luke writes that Jesus, on the Sabbath, went back to Nazareth and, as was his custom, entered the synagogue. They called upon him to read the Scripture and to comment on it. The passage was from the Book of Isaiah where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and freedom to those in captivity; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Is 61:1-2). A “year of the Lord’s favour” or “mercy”: this is what the Lord proclaimed and this is what we wish to live now. This Holy Year will bring to the fore the richness of Jesus’ mission echoed in the words of the prophet: to bring a word and gesture of consolation to the poor, to proclaim liberty to those bound by new forms of slavery in modern society, to restore sight to those who can see no more because they are caught up in themselves, to restore dignity to all those from whom it has been robbed.

Discussion question
1. What is Pope Francis urging us to do from these words?
2. Why does the resurrection of Jesus fail to convince people of his day, and why does it still fail to convince people today?
3. How can you show mercy more to those in need in your life and community?

Closing prayers
In a time of quiet, ask God to soften our hearts and make us more open towards others and particularly those in poverty. Lift to God any suggestions from the group. Finish with the Year of Mercy Prayer.
The Judge and the Widow –
Luke 18:1-8 – Never give up praying for mercy

Opening prayer
Lord, we know what it’s like to be discouraged with prayer, when it's hard to pray any longer, hard to hold out hope. Some of us experience this today. Turn our eyes to you afresh, strengthen our faith, freshen our hope, enliven our prayers, until you come again. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

Leader
This parable is about prayer. Praying Christians often give up hope and many of us stop expecting things when we pray ‘Thy will be done’.

Opening question
Ask the members of the group to think of a time when they became discouraged with prayer. How did they feel? How did they respond? (Share responses)

Scripture

And he told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. 2 He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man; 3 and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Vindicate me against my adversary.’ 4 For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor regard man, 5 yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.’” 6 And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7 And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

Discussion questions

1. What are the key words in verse 1? Why? What images come to mind when you think about the widow and the judge?

2. What motivates the widow and what motivates the judge?

3. How would you describe the circumstances of those who are praying to God in verses 6-8? In what ways can we expect God to do far more for those in verse 7 than the judge did for the widow?

Quotations from Misericordiae Vultus

14. Merciful like the Father, is the “motto” of this Holy Year. In mercy, we find proof of how God loves us. He gives his entire self, always, freely, asking nothing in return. He comes to our aid whenever we call upon him. What a beautiful thing that the Church begins her daily prayer with the words, “O God, come to my assistance. O Lord, make haste to help me“ (Ps 70:2)! The assistance we ask for is already the first step of God’s mercy toward us. He comes to assist us in our weakness. And his help consists in helping us accept his presence and closeness to us. Day after day, touched by his compassion, we also can become compassionate towards others.
24. At the foot of the Cross, Mary, together with John, the disciple of love, witnessed the words of forgiveness spoken by Jesus. This supreme expression of mercy towards those who crucified him show us the point to which the mercy of God can reach. Mary attests that the mercy of the Son of God knows no bounds and extends to everyone, without exception. Let us address her in the words of the Salve Regina, a prayer ever ancient and ever new, so that she may never tire of turning her merciful eyes upon us, and make us worthy to contemplate the face of mercy, her Son Jesus.

Discussion question

1. What is Pope Francis urging us to do from these words?

2. What encourages you to pray? What encourages you particularly when you find praying difficult?

Closing prayers
Ask the group to think of one or two examples where they have been discouraged. Ask God to help them to be persistent in prayers. Say together the Salve Regina or the Lord's Prayer.
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

1. The purpose of this question is to provide an overview of the text. Jesus seems to answer the expert’s question, “Who is my neighbour?” by addressing the many ways the religious leaders justify their failure to love others. These justifications might include having more important things to do for God, not being able to put oneself in harm’s way for the sake of another, and judging another person as not “good enough” to qualify as our neighbour and deserve our love. Priests were descendants of Aaron who served in the temple and offered sacrifices. Levites were descendants of Levi (but not Aaron) who assisted in temple services. The expert in the law might have expected such religious men to help the one on the side of the road. (They were returning from Jerusalem, so they were not in danger of ritual defilement if the man happened to be dead). In Jesus’ day the Samaritans were hated by the Jews and, no doubt, by this expert in the law. He could love his Jewish neighbours, but felt no obligation to love people of the despised Samaritan race.

2. The Samaritan put himself to a lot of personal inconvenience, not only by delaying his own journey but also by putting himself at risk of being attacked. He also paid generously for the man to be cared for.

3. Remember that parables are designed to overturn our existing ideas and to bring about new ways of thinking and acting. Encourage the group to explore how the parable might have affected the expert in the law.

THE LOST SHEEP

1. The lost sheep particularly are those who have turned their back on God. The word “lost” is the same word that is translated “perish” in John 3:16. It means ‘to be lost, ruined, or destroyed’. It is used to refer to being sent away into Hell! In other words, this little sheep is in great danger. It is headed for ruin. It is headed for destruction. This sheep is lost because it has wandered away. It is lost by its own fault, because of our sinful nature.

2. When the shepherd realises that there is one of his flock missing he is motivated by the danger to the sheep and the loss to himself and takes immediate action to restore this sheep to its proper place in the fold. The shepherd knows that the sheep is in great danger so he is moved to do something to save this lost sheep. This sheep may have wandered away from the shepherd, but it was still precious to Him. There was value in that sheep and the shepherd wanted it returned to his flock. He cared about that one little lost sheep. Note that just one sheep was missing, yet the shepherd still went. Another shepherd might have counted the personal cost and decided to let that one sheep go and be lost forever. But this shepherd saw the value in just one sheep and he went after it. Jesus came to die for each one of us. The shepherd did not stop until his mission had been completed and the sheep had been found! Jesus did not stop on His quest until He was able to cry, “It is finished”, John 19:30.

3. This shepherd was able to rejoice with his friends and neighbours because his lost sheep was found. He was overjoyed with the rescue of this one, lost sheep. Jesus makes it clear that heaven gets excited about the salvation of just ONE lost soul, because fellowship has been restored. Maybe the Church could be more involved in searching for the one lost.
The Prodigal Son

1. The Pharisees would strongly object to the son’s squandering his wealth and wild living. Notice, however, the other offensive elements of the story. Normally, the sons did not receive their inheritance until the father’s death—although this story obviously indicates there were exceptions to this rule. The distant country was probably outside of Jewish territory, so the son was living with Gentiles, ‘dogs’, as the Jews referred to them. In addition, he was feeding pigs, animals which Jews were forbidden to eat and which no self-respecting Jew would ever own as livestock. Finally, the son sank so low that he even ate the ‘pigs’ food himself! Give the group time to discover many of these details on their own, but feel free to mention any items they omit. The Pharisees would have expected the father to reject his son.

2. Verses 20-24 show us that God the Father has extraordinary love and mercy for each of us. He longs to be with us and is joyful when we are close to him.

3. This parable can be viewed from two perspectives – that of the younger son and that of the older son. The younger son represents the tax collectors and the sinners who were gathering around Jesus. It assures such people that the father joyfully accepts those who repent. The older son represents the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law. The parable challenges their condemning, self-righteous attitude by urging them to view ‘sinners’ from the father’s perspective. But notice that the father pursues the older son and extends his mercy to him despite his attitude. The question Jesus now poses to the Jewish leaders is – who is really the lost son? The father has come out to talk to the older son, searching for him as it were, seeking to bring him back.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

Background
Jesus told this parable to the Pharisees who lived by a rigid code of religious laws which gained them a personal sense of superiority, the respect of the public and all kinds of power—but which had little to do with love and compassion. The reason Jesus tells them this story is that he has just been talking about pursuing spiritual wealth rather than material wealth and the Pharisees who loved money were privately sneering at Jesus’ teaching (Lk 16:14). Jesus tells them a dramatic story about how it is possible to become so hardened that not only will one refuse to listen to the wisdom of Scripture but also refuse to listen to the wisdom of someone who rises from the dead.

1. Even though Lazarus is named, which is unusual for a parable, it is only a parable. In biblical times purple was cloth dyed with a very costly dye (obtained from the shellfish murex). It would be used for the outer garment and the fine linen of the undergarment. It represents the ultimate in luxury. Lazarus longed to eat from the table of the rich man but there is no indication that he did so. Notice that the dogs have greater compassion than the rich man.
2. The parables differ from plain teaching. This parable is not designed to give an accurate portrayal of heaven and hell, but more to emphasize the importance of value judgements made in this life in the light of their impact on the next.

3. There is an unmistakable allusion to Christ’s resurrection in verse 31. However, even this failed to convince those who had no interest in listening to God.

**THE WIDOW AND THE JUDGE**

The purpose is to show us why we pray and not to give up. Encourage the group to share some of their internal conflicts. It can be very freeing for people to be able to talk about it.

1. To understand this parable, we must recognize the kind of comparison Jesus intends us to make between judge and God. It is an argument from the ‘lesser to the greater’. If the judge was such an uncaring person and he granted the widow’s request, then *how much more* will a loving and just God answer our prayers. This is not the same thing as saying that God is ‘similar’ to the judge.

2. These verses show the desperation of those who are praying and it indicates what will happen to those in the end times. Suffering could dampen the faith of many. Great tribulations are apparent in other Scripture passages (Matthew 24:12.) Jesus is trying to assure people, which applies not just to the end of time but also to other trials and tribulations we may have.

**Notes**

1. The Bible readings are taken from the Catholic Edition of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.  