

## Our Father's great mercy

This has been a very intense but blessed time period in our church. There are seasons when life is simply more intense and God has been teaching me patience in particular during this season of life while He has been teaching others the lesson of faith, still others the lesson of peace, etc. I continue to marvel at our great God who knows each of our needs and our weaknesses and the ways in which we need to grow in order to look more Christ-like. We all have trials. Mine may not look exactly like yours but they are perfectly ordained by a God who knows more of what I need than I do. This is our Father's great mercy.

Mustafa and Martina weren't able to come with Dori and I this past Sunday to evangelize but it was still a rich Sunday out evangelizing. I prayed at the beginning for a particular boldness and the Lord was (as He always is!) good to respond.

A few conversations which struck me from this past Sunday included one with three teenage girls and another with two elderly women. Two groups of people – different age brackets and completely different outlooks on life. However, the main message that we shared with both of these “groups” was the same and in both cases I walked away thinking, “oh thank you, Lord, that you opened my eyes . . . not because of any merit of my own, but solely because of your abundant grace.”

In the context of an in-depth conversation with the teenage girls, we asked them if God was just and fair in sending people, who had ignored Him in this lifetime, to eternal condemnation. They admitted that this was indeed just. Too true, one of them said. And yet, it was sadly too easy for them to put their heads down in shame and say this one minute, recognizing this sin in themselves, and then look disinterested and apathetic as the conversation continued. Oh, but am I any better? Absolutely not. True, I have the Holy Spirit who dwells in me. I have been covered with the sweet blood of Jesus Christ but this only holds me to greater accountability. I have received much and yet too often I do the same thing as these three girls . . . I recognize my state before God and then I quickly become consumed with myself or other thoughts or brush my sin off rather than wanting to “hear” more (i.e. to repent and to know more of Christ). What humbling lessons.

The two elderly women seemed to be friends and yet couldn't have had more opposing reactions to the gospel. Before leaving them, we mentioned the importance of reading the Word of God in order to get to know God personally. Eda listened but said that she gave up the Bible a long time ago because she can't understand it. However, she seemed willing to receive some materials in order to help her in her understanding of the Bible. Her friend on the other hand screwed up her face and declared adamantly “I hate the Bible!” She informed us that she has her ideas and didn't want to be bothered any longer.

Oh, she doesn't know what she's saying! Through all of this, I just marveled all the more at the gift of salvation. I know the truth and that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. Why doesn't she? God's ways are not ours. I am humbled that He would choose me and touch me and love me. Should this not give each one of us an increased joy in our salvation every day? It is not to be taken for granted! We didn't do a single thing to deserve this gift. How will I honor the gift-Giver today?

Furthermore, as I said before, the Lord has been teaching me patience as well through various aspects. He has had so much patience with me, why should I not have patience with others? He is good to teach me to rest and wait on His timing with each of these conversations and evangelistic outings.

Regarding this intense season of life in our church, there are many motives for prayer. Allow me to share several so that you may be informed in your prayers over our church body here. Thank you

for partnering with us so faithfully in this!

Gianni, the man who found the trampled tract laying on the ground two weeks ago, continues to come despite the fact that his girlfriend Lucia doesn't see the need for Christ herself. She says that she's had her "Christian" experience and that seems to be enough for her. However, Gianni is hungry and desirous to know Christ. He definitely doesn't come for the fellowship but rather has a one-track mind whenever he's with us. He's focused on knowing God personally. He has only been a part of our body for a brief time but his thirst to know Christ is convicting. I cannot say that I always have that drive when it comes to knowing more of my Savior and dwelling in Him more intimately each day. It's too easy to have a "ten-track" mind, thinking of several things at once rather than just looking up to Christ. Oh, that I may have more of that kind of mindset!

Perhaps in Marco's updates, you've heard mention of Gigi and Anna, the couple who came to know Christ through our website AiutoBiblico (Bible Help) and then became a part of our church body. Well, they came up for a visit over two weeks ago and have very little contact with our church body since that time due to lots of wrong thinking. How easy it is for any one of us to fall into wrong thinking and reasoning which only nurses our pride and takes us farther from the truth. Sometimes, we don't realize how following our reasoning rather than Christ is so damaging until it's too late. Pray that Gigi and Anna will look to Christ as their authority and not their human reasoning.

Marco is spending lots of time during the week on the phone with men from various parts of Italy. Each of these men is desirous of good biblical teaching and have come into contact with Marco through the website AiutoBiblico. We give God praise for how He continues to use this site and how it is opening several doors for regular contact with these men and their families. Please pray for Marco, that he may have wisdom in knowing how to counsel and guide.

Gigi and Mirella just came up from Florence to visit us for the weekend. Gigi is one of the men with whom Marco has been in touch. Hearing some of their story caused me to be aware once again of how blessed I am to have a church where the Word of God is faithfully preached. There are many believers throughout Italy, like Gigi and Mirella, who literally have no solid church near their home. Sadly, it's too easy to take what we have for granted. May our prayer be that each one of us abound in thanksgiving for the blessings that we have and that we give out of the much that we have received from our good Father.

Finally, my family (parents and sister, Alexa) is coming within the next two days and I am looking forward to some time with them. I pray that they may be enriched spiritually by their visit and that we all may see more of Christ through our time together. I will be meeting them in Rome and as a result I will have some time with Piera whom I have not seen since leaving Italy in December. She is not doing well spiritually. While I was in the States, she went to Rome, hoping to sell her apartment but now has more or less settled back into her life there, having found a job and not having sold her apartment yet. She says that at this point she doesn't intend to come back here to the Rovigo area to live. Piera has already stated in e-mail exchanges that she doesn't want to talk about the things of the Lord. Please pray for my brief visit with her. I don't have the words and the wisdom but Christ, who dwells in me, is powerful, and I do see that this visit has been orchestrated perfectly by the Lord. I am extremely grateful for this time with Piera and then with my family.

Love to you all in the name of our common Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May we all grow in humility before the Lord and recognize what it means to have Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, that we may increase daily in the joy of our salvation.

Humbled by God's mercy toward me,  
Ashley

