

**For the article of this month, we want to share with you a personal experience of God's mercy in one's life and how the loving mercy of God is strengthen and nurtured by the members of the parish faith community.**

### **Holding a precious gift within a broken vessel!**

As a child I lived in a broken family, there were four of us siblings, mum sought to care for us as much as she could, but tended to over drink and thus was not always fully present. Dad would come 'home' only when he was ill or needing feeding otherwise he would be on the street.

We all left home as soon as we could, seeking to make a life of our own. I got caught up with a man who was ten years my senior when I was only 17 years old and had a son by him. By the age of twenty I was already into light drugs, with my partner, but after eight years he left me for a younger woman and I lost myself in prostitution, in order to have some money for myself and my son. This keep going for around ten years. I was in a dire situation especially once my teenage son was taken in by the police for breaking in, stealing and harming seriously a person. What hurt most was that my son did not want me to visit or see him. That was the day when under the influence of the alcohol I made the choice to stagger into the Church, and sat right at the back near the foyer. As a Child I had been baptised a Catholic and received the sacraments of Holy Communion and Confirmation, but that was long time ago.

Mass was being celebrated by a young priest who would have been only in his mid- forties. During the homily he spoke about God's infinite love, that he is always waiting for us to be grasped in his arms, to be healed and to begin a new life in and with him. I cannot remember what else was said, but all I know is that I started to cry, at first silently but soon I could no longer control my sobbing and lament. I notice that in an almost unobtrusive manner a Sister came close to me and asked if she could help, if I want a glass of water. Awkwardly I nodded and she led me to a private room apart, which had tea and coffee available and a couple of arm chairs. It was then that I shared with Sister something of my life experiences. In her presence I felt she understood my situation, giving me total attention and in no way being judgemental. She offered to take me home to my one room apartment and told me that she would be available if I needed anything and left her phone number. I did use that number a number of times, especially when I hit rock bottom again , with my drinking and having men using me, I lapsed into my old ways again and again, but gradually grew to believe and trust that the parish community who always welcomed me showing real care and acceptance without making me feel a failure or a weakling, led me gradually to come to believe that God truly loves me unconditionally and his mercy is ever faithful and enduring, bestowing upon me dignity and purpose, notwithstanding the failures and shortcomings. I came to appreciate the opportunity of having a chat with the Parish

Priest by regularly celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation. I am now an active member of the faith community, weekly celebrating the Sunday Eucharist and reaching out to the most vulnerable by being part of Saint Vincent de Paul Society. My son was able to study, finish an apprenticeship and have a permanent full time work in the building sector; besides making some good friends. With the passage of time, we have come closer to one another while reconciling with our past hurts and mistakes.

Yes, that day, at the back of the Church while the community were celebrating the Eucharist, the most precious gift was given to me -the experience of God's merciful unconditional love. It was then strengthens and nurtured by the love, acceptance and true mercy that Sister and the Parishioners enfleshed for me.

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