

INTO YOUR HANDS – JUNE 2025

Since the death of Pope Francis on April 21, I have found myself reflecting on his papal motto, “*Miserando atque eligendo*,” which basically translates to “having mercy and choosing him.”

Pope Francis first chose this motto when he was called to be a bishop in Argentina. He then chose to keep the same motto when called upon to serve as the Bishop of Rome and Holy Father of our Church.

The motto was derived from a homily that St. Bede the Venerable preached on the feast of St. Matthew the Apostle. St. Bede spoke of Jesus’ mercy toward the tax collector, choosing Matthew to follow him. Matthew’s experience, as one who received mercy and was chosen, reflects Pope Francis’ own personal experience of Jesus. As a young man, Jorge Bergoglio had his own experience of God’s mercy and of God’s choosing him. It was out of that personal experience that he would find himself capable to answer the call to shepherd the Church and guide her in the revelation of God’s love for the world, extending charity and compassion to all. His hope was that everyone might also come to experience a blessed encounter with God’s mercy and the joy of knowing God’s choosing of them.

When our eyes have been opened to see how the Lord has shown us mercy and chosen us as His disciples, we discover how we are not only called but also equipped for service in the Church. Whether that service will be offered as pope, bishop, priest, deacon, religious or layperson, the experience is the same. Our call must be rooted in a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. That encounter with Jesus Christ will transform us and serve to make us capable of living out the words of the prophet Micah—to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. Only when we are rooted in love and have a willingness to show mercy will our call truly come to life. If our call is born out of self-service or self-promotion, we will not find success in our

discipleship. An experience of the Risen Christ alive and present to us, revealed in selfless love and in moments of mercy, will be what encourages and equips us for service.

I was serving as the pastor of a parish in suburban Chicago when Pope Francis introduced himself to the world following the conclave in March 2013. From the beginning of his pontificate, I have witnessed Pope Francis' commitment to serve in humility, to be present and accompany others lovingly, and to offer a powerful witness to the truth both in word and in deed. My life, thus far, has been spent under the care of six different popes, each one of them challenging me to answer the call of Christ first given to me in baptism. From my youth, throughout my priesthood, and now lived out as a bishop, I have been invited to join with the Church in her effort to proclaim the Good News and build up the Kingdom of God. As each pope has given his life generously in service to the Church, we are all invited to do the same so that our Church might fulfill her mission as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

We now join with our newly elected pontiff, setting our sights on the journey ahead, confident that the Holy Spirit will continue to inspire and guide us, knowing that we have been called and equipped for the work of discipleship entrusted to us this day.