

## Christmas 2012

Dear Family and Friends:

RV was in vintage curmudgeon mode. We were in Buffalo for Thanksgiving and, true to form, RV was awake at a morning hour that should not be allowed to exist. He went to the hotel lobby to work on documents. However, the obligatory 24-7 TV was on with black Friday advertisements. The media hype itself was over the top, interviewing people waiting in line at various stores. People string themselves out, spending money they do not have, getting deals on things they do not need, to put someone else in the black.

As the commercial parody of the Christmas season coarsens, we find ourselves drawn to reflecting on God's redemptive mercy. Calendar year 2012 saw the release of a new movie of an old classic, Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. Hugo's epic tale hinges on the mercy of Bishop Myriel. The bishop shows hospitality to Jean Valjean, a recently released prisoner, giving him food, drink, and shelter. Valjean returns Myriel's kindness by stealing the diocesan silver and sneaking away. He is caught by the police. He lies to the officers, telling them that the bishop gave him the silver. Incredulous, the police march him back to the bishop's residence to verify his story. The bishop confounds both the police and Valjean by validating Valjean's deception and gently chastising him for not "accepting" the silver candlesticks as well. Until then, Valjean had been a convict—a thief, a prisoner, a dispensable number. The bishop sees him as a needy person without means and meets that need by extending to him sacrificial mercy. He brings that point home to Valjean: "[N]ever forget that you have promised me to use this silver to become an honest man ... you belong no longer to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I am buying for you. I withdraw it from the dark thoughts ... and I give it to God."

Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice* summarizes the cycle of redemptive mercy received and given:

But mercy is above this scepter'd sway;  
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings;  
It is an attribute of God himself;  
And earthly power doth then show like God's  
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore  
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,  
That in the course of justice none of us  
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;  
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render  
The deeds of mercy.

At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of the true Bishop of our souls. Jesus is God in the flesh on a mission of redemptive mercy to save, to enable, to ennoble. The incarnation of the Son of God opens the cosmic drama of mercy seasoning justice that culminates in His sacrifice on the cross. We are so thankful for the annual opportunity to remind ourselves that we are recipients of, and debtors to, his mercy.

We wish you a very Merry Christmas and a most joyous New Year.