

Does the Year of Mercy mean God has gone soft on sin? “Who am I to judge?” said Pope Francis. Does that really mean that nothing is really wrong anymore and that anything goes?

Does God have a dark side? Does he ever get upset or angry? Does Hell exist and will any of us ultimately end up there?

What the Year of Mercy meant for me is a complete reappraisal of who or what God is, and a complete reappraisal of how we, as Catholic Christians should be living our lives.

That God, I have rediscovered this year does get hurt. Our neglect, our sin, our unkindness to one another, our reluctance to get involved, our reluctance to dig that bit deeper, are all things that wound our God.

But the wonderful thing about this God of ours is that he knew all along that this was how it was going to be. This is the price of love, the price of creating individuals who are free to make their own decisions.

This is who Jesus is - *the image of the unseen God* - who enters our darkness, *the image of the unseen God* who pays the price for that love.

This is the very pinnacle of creation, the point where everything changes, the point where justice is done, the point where all things are reconciled, *everything in heaven and everything on earth*.

But this is not just God letting us off lightly. This reconciliation costs God everything. He makes *peace by his death on the cross*.

This is how the Church must be too. It's how we Catholic Christians should be - not worrying about our own dignity, our own status, but being prepared to give ourselves away in the service of others, being prepared to listen to what other people have to say, being prepared to stand alongside those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Somehow, we have got to get off our pedestals and realise that we are all in the same boat together. Our prayer, our worship need to be deeper and more real, more personal at one level and more outward-looking at another.

We need to rediscover all over again the wonders of Holy Scripture and the wonders of Holy Mass. And most of all, we need to live Catholic lives of our own, right in the midst of the human family, on the very Cross of Christ, from which we will hear those amazing words: *“Indeed I promise you....today you will be with me in Paradise”*.