

*Blessed Are the Merciful*

human heart the very idea of mercy.”

Pope Francis emboldened us in his *Misericordiae Vultus: Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* (2015), stating, “[w]e are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us. Pardoning offences becomes the clearest expression of merciful love, and for us Christians it is an imperative from which we cannot excuse ourselves.” Pardoning offenses and showing mercy is a choice—most often a very difficult choice—that many of us think about but, more often than not, ultimately reject.

A teenager named Elena showed me that being merciful under difficult circumstances is a sign of strength, not weakness. She did that by choosing from a merciful heart to forgive her father who had abandoned and mistreated her.

Elena grew up in a small town in El Salvador. She often had little to eat and had a medical condition that required therapy to clear her lungs and also access to an inhaler. With no money for medicine or doctors, she was frequently hospitalized. When Elena was five, her father left El Salvador for the United States, ostensibly to find work and send money back to Elena and her mother so that Elena could get the medical help she needed. After several months, her father discontinued communication and sent no money for his daughter’s care—in essence, abandoning his family. At the same

## BLESSED ARE THE REFUGEES

time, Elena and her mother were threatened by men to whom Elena's father owed money.

Elena's mother felt the pain and desperation of trying to keep her daughter healthy and safe while having minimal access to medical resources and food. In search of a better life and access to medical care, Elena's mother with the now eight-year-old girl took the long and arduous journey to Texas to live with Elena's aunt. Elena's father, who lived in Baltimore, soon discovered that Elena was in the United States. Elena's delight at learning that her father was coming to see her was short-lived, as her father took her back to Baltimore to live with him, denying her mother access to Elena for a period of time.

Although Elena's father took care of the girl's medical needs and enrolled her in school, he also hit her when he became upset with her, and sometimes forced her to dress in boys' clothes, which humiliated her. Her health struggles were exacerbated because of this stress, and she had to be hospitalized many times.

Her father also controlled Elena's relationship with her mother, allowing only limited communication. As an eight-year-old, Elena didn't understand that her mother was trying to move closer to Elena or that her mother had no legal recourse to get Elena back, since her mother was undocumented. For four years, Elena believed the lies her father told her, and she grew bitter in her heart toward the mother she thought had loved her. In her naivete,