

The Grace of Generosity

Homily for Divine Mercy Sunday
April 19, 2020

This is Divine Mercy Sunday when we are invited in a particular way to meditate on the mercy of God manifested to us through the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is therefore fitting that on this Sunday we are given such a vivid picture of the mercy of Jesus in the Gospel reading.

Did you notice what our Lord instructs Thomas to do? After extending the Resurrection greeting of “Peace” a clear expression of the mercy of Jesus, he then invites the skeptical apostle to touch the place where the wounds of the crucifixion nails had pierced Jesus’ flesh. He wants Thomas to experience in a tactile way how Jesus offered his merciful body for the salvation of the world.

Then Jesus says:

“Do not be faithless but believing”.

Of course at the most fundamental level he means, believe in the fact that I have been raised from the dead. But at an even deeper level he is inviting Thomas to see and feel that he is the merciful saviour. It is at this point Thomas then says

“My Lord and my God”.

This is the earliest Creed expressed by an Apostle after the Resurrection. By referring to Jesus as God, he now understands more fully than he had previously that Jesus is the God of Israel. He is the one who addressed Moses at the Burning Bush. He is the God who spoke through the Prophets. He is the Great “I Am”, The God in and through whom all things exist.

But notice he also calls Jesus “my Lord”. This means that Thomas understands that he is to now govern his own life based on the teaching and example of Jesus, a life that is most fully captured by the word “mercy”. Everything that Jesus taught and everything he did is now ratified because of his Resurrection. Thomas understood that Jesus’ merciful life is the pattern by which all people can live a genuine human life because the Lord’s Resurrection affirmed that mercy does indeed triumph over judgement, at St James so beautifully expresses in his Letter.

Thomas called Jesus “My Lord and My God” and Jesus blessed him for this. But notice the beatitude he speaks to you and me.

“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe

What are the implications for us to see in Jesus the merciful Lord and God? Our readings give us a clear and explicit answer to this question. All three of them affirm that when we have been touched by and have touched the merciful Lord, what I want to call “The Grace of Generosity” is to be exhibited in how we live.

In all three readings this theme of “The Grace of Generosity” is evident.

In the Lesson from Acts we have a snap shot of how the earliest Christian community lived in light of the Resurrection. St Luke tells us that this was a community where mercy was expressed through the grace of generosity in practical kindness.

³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need.

This kind of mercy was an expression of practical care where the disciples realized that because of how they were now relating to the Resurrected Christ, this affected the way they were relate to each other. They understood that in loving one another they were loving the risen Lord. They recognized the Resurrected Christ in the other and so realized that it was imperative they extend practical mercy to the other. Here the grace of generosity was expressed through acts of practical kindness.

St Peter in his Epistle also expresses this theme of the grace of generosity through practical theology. Listen to how mercy is to shape our lives:

By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead

How does this living hope influence how we live in the present? Even though we go through trials that are like a refining fire we are generous in our love towards Jesus because of his Divine Mercy towards us:

Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. 9 As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls.

Christians have a perspective on life that allows us to live trustingly because the outcome of placing our faith in the mercy of Jesus Christ is the salvation of our souls.

This then brings us to the Gospel where we have a clear statement of how we appropriate the grace of generosity in our own lives -through practical confession. Because we are all influenced by the world and its values, there are times when we do not reflect the family likeness of Jesus. Jesus knew that this would be the case and so he says:

“Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Here Jesus invites all of us to remember that he is the merciful saviour who knows that as we continue on our pilgrimage through this world we will need to have a place where we can go to make present Jesus' mercy in our own lives. He has given us the sacrament of mercy for this very reason. What a grace it is to take advantage of Confession. For we are all like Thomas, vacillating in our commitment, at times struggling with faith, hope and love and so in need of Jesus' ongoing mercy.

May we discover by the grace of Jesus' merciful love what it means to live in this unusual and trying Season the blessedness of knowing Jesus even though we can't receive Him in the Eucharist. Through practical kindness and practical theology and through the Sacrament of Reconciliation I pray you and I will encounter Jesus' grace of generosity in our lives so that in turn we can extend it to others.