

Homily For Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent - Year I St Peter's 8:30/7:00 Masses - Tuesday, March 14, 2023

Daniel 3:25-43 "We have no ruler or prophet or sacrifice or place to make an offering for mercy."

Psalms 25:4-9 "Your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love have been from of old."

Matthew 18:21-35 "Both servants fell on their knees and pleaded, Have patience and I will pay you."

An Infinity of Forgiveness

Introduction

At the gates of heaven, St. Peter tells the recently dead man that he needs a hundred points to enter. The man offers the greatest accomplishments of his life: Church attendance, tithing, 50 years of faithful marriage, even starting a soup kitchen. All of this only gets him to 10 points. In despair, he cries out that he will never get in except by the grace of God, to which Peter says, that's worth 100 points. Enter the kingdom of heaven.

I can relate more to the way a woman was explaining to a man what he would need to do for his wife to gain a similar reward. Give her gifts was the advice. You mean like a rose? Yes, that would be worth a point. So, what if I give her a hundred roses? Yes, that's good. One point. The gift, no matter how big, has to be given a hundred times. In human relationships, it takes time and effort and consistency.

Matthew

This is essentially the same conversation that Peter has with Jesus. How many times do I have to forgive a brother? Peter has been with Jesus long enough to know that the conversation is about what it takes to enter the kingdom of heaven. I think you and I already likely know that everything in this life is really about preparing for the kingdom of heaven. We fall short every day. That's why we have Lent. But generally we know about our dependence on the mercy of God. But, we live in the world. And the world we live in keeps us thinking too small.

Peter already knows that forgiveness is key. He knows you have to forgive more than once. In fact, he uses the number seven. Seven is the number of creation, indicating completeness of forgiveness. So he has the basic message. Jesus indicates that Peter is kind of on the right track but there is much more, but it's not just seven times. It's seventy seven times.

To illustrate the size of this quality of forgiveness, Jesus tells the story, familiar to us, of a king and two servants. The debt owed by us to God is a ridiculously huge number on its own. But then, if you compare it with what the one servant owes the other, the difference is something like sixty thousand to one.

Here we come to the basic proclamation of the Gospel, which Jesus describes in dozens of ways throughout his ministry and, in the most profound way of all, on the cross for our sins. The proclaiming of the Gospel is called in Greek, the Kerygma. There are four phases of the Kerygma. First is that the infinite and perfect God of love created us only for the purpose of receiving his blessed life in us. The assumption in the parable is that the king gave a servant what would amount to pretty much the whole kingdom. That servant was given basically an infinite blessing, like what God has given us.

The second point of the Gospel message is also kind of hidden in the story. The servant who received an almost infinite treasure has somehow lost it. What did he do with it? What could a servant possibly have done with the king's treasure? This tells you and I what we have lost by our participation in sin.

Now we come to the actual events of the parable. The king asks for repayment. The servant cannot. That's an impossibility. The king lets him speak, which he does from his knees, asking for mercy, which the king gives him. That's the third part of the Kerygma. After we were given everything, then lost it, we could not repay but, through sincere repentance, we have access to the mercy of God through our saviour, who took on our nature to repay the debt that we could not.

We need to appreciate that God's mercy to us is without limit. Nowhere in our earthly experience can we receive the measure of mercy God is offering us. The

hard part for us is NOT how we can come up with the payment. It's whether we will humble ourselves to ask.

Through the parable, Jesus is preparing us to feel the weight of our own situation as sinners, so that we can more deeply appreciate God's infinite mercy, not only to receive it but to offer it, in turn, to others. That is the fourth step in the Kerygma. It is the willingness to live a life that mirrors to others what God has given to us. It is true that some injuries feel so deep that it is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offense. That is, of course, where grace comes in, to do what we cannot possibly do by even our best imitation of holiness.

Daniel

From the book of the prophet Daniel, Azariah admits that he is in the fire, an image of hell, because of the sins of the whole people. We have been brought low because of our sins. We have lost everything: prophets, leaders. We can't even properly plea for mercy because we have no place to make an offering. All we have, he says, is a contrite heart and a humble spirit that, despite what we have done, may we be accepted. All he has is trust in God.

Call To Conversion

Azariah prays for mercy, not just for himself but for a whole sinful people. It says that he stood still in the flames. What an image. Chaos all around and he stands still and prays. Again this Lent we are reminded that We have to stand still. Their situation is entirely and absolutely beyond our fixing. It is, from a worldly perspective, an infinitely bad situation.

This Lent, we need to appreciate that God's mercy to us is without limit. We can't deserve it. Nowhere in our earthly experience can we receive the measure of mercy God is offering us.

The catechism phrases this well: "There is no offense, however serious, that the Church cannot forgive. There is no one, however wicked and guilty, who may not confidently hope for forgiveness, provided his repentance is honest. Christ who

died for all men desires that in his Church the gates of forgiveness should always be open to anyone who turns away from sin.” (CCC N° 982)

The law of mercy is to understand our need for his mercy, receive it, then offer it to others. It may be the hardest thing we can ever do. That's why it begins with a contrite heart, a humble spirit. That's the only way to gain the hundred points. That's the Gospel proclamation.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *To you I call, for you will surely heed me, O God.*

Collect: *May your grace not forsake us.*

Daniel: *Azariah, condemned to death, stood still in the fire and prayed aloud: Do not withdraw your mercy from us, whom you promised to multiply descendants like the stars and like the sand. We, O Lord, have become fewer than any other nation, and are brought low this day because of our sins. We have no ruler or prophet or leader or sacrifice or incense, no place to make an offering before you to find mercy. Yet with a contrite heart and a humble spirit may we be accepted as though it were with tens of thousands of fat lambs. Do not put us to shame but deal with us in your abundant mercy.*

Psalm: *Make me to know your ways, O Lord. Be mindful of your mercy and your steadfast love. Do not remember my transgressions. The Lord instructs sinners. He leads the humble in his way.*

Offering Prayer: *We pray that this saving sacrifice may cleanse us of our faults.*

Matthew: *Peter said to Jesus: Lord, if a brother or sister sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times? Jesus answered: Not seven times, but seventy seven times. The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. One who owed him ten thousand talents fell on his knees saying: Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything. Out of pity, the lord released him and forgave him the debt. That same slave came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him one hundred denarii. Seizing him by the throat, he said, Pay what you owe. He fell down and pleaded with him, Have patience and I will pay you. But he threw him into prison until he should pay. His fellow slaves were greatly distressed and reported to their lord, who said: You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave as I had mercy on you? And his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.*