

## **Homily For Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent - Year II**

### **St Peter's 8:30am/7:00pm Masses - Tuesday, March 22, 2022**

**Daniel 3: 25, 34-43** "We have no ruler or prophet or sacrifice or place to make an offering for mercy."

**Psalms 25: 4-9** "The Lord instructs sinners and leads the humble in his way."

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

### **An Infinity of Forgiveness**

#### **Introduction**

Even if only for one Lenten discipline, today's passages from the Sacred Scriptures would be an amazing gift. That would be the discipline of prayer. Do we want to know how to pray well? Here are three amazing examples. These passages tell us first that praying well absolutely requires an awareness of our need for mercy. Second it requires an awareness that we cannot possibly deserve what we are praying for. In the world, that makes no sense at all. But in the kingdom of God, it is the way it works. It is the law of mercy.

Listen to the psalmist: Remember your mercy. Make me know your way. Teach me your paths.

Listen to Azariah: We are brought low by our sins. We have nothing to offer you and no one to lead us and no place to make an offering. All we have is a contrite heart and a humble spirit. Do not put us to shame but deal with us in your abundant mercy.

Listen to the two servants in Jesus' parable: I fall on my knees before you asking that you have patience with me and I will pay you everything.

#### **Daniel**

Now if we look a little closer at the prayer of Azariah and the parable servants, we can see a distinction. Azariah is Daniel's friend. He and his buddies have lost everything: land, temple and freedom. Now they have been bound hand and foot by order of the king of Babylon. Then they are thrown into a furnace so hot (seven

times hotter than normal it tells us), that it kills the soldiers who threw them in. But what happens? There they are praying. They have less than nothing but put themselves at the mercy of God. Their situation is entirely and absolutely beyond fixing. It is, from a worldly perspective, an infinitely bad situation. In the movies, something happens to save the heroes. But here there is nothing except the mercy of God. They are saved by God only out of his mercy but also because they make God's mercy active by their absolute humility in the face of it.

## **Matthew**

Then there is Jesus, who tells a parable about a similarly hopeless situation. The debt owed by a servant is infinite. How a servant got into debt by 10,000 talents is not known. The point is that it is a ridiculous amount. The point is, of course, that we do not have to be good at math to realize that God is offering an unbelievably greater amount of mercy to us than we could possibly ever expect. The servant falls on his knees and asks for patience until he would pay it back. Is this reasonable or possible? Of course not.

That is why, if we are serious about our return to God 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.

Peter already knows that we have to be merciful like God. He uses the number seven, indicating completeness of forgiveness. But Jesus wants him to go to the next level. It's not just seven times. It's seventy seven times. I am quite certain that Jesus means mercy itself is infinite.

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. If not, we will essentially be responsible for our own torture until we can pay every last penny, which is impossible.

We are in an impossible payback situation. But there are two things we can do. First is to throw ourselves at the mercy of God, who wants to give mercy to us. Second is to offer what mercy we can to others. Forgiving someone for the same offense against us three times would seem to be plenty. Seven times would seem

like more than enough. But Jesus is asking us to recognize the gift of mercy we are offered and do what we can to offer it to others without placing limits on it.

Jesus teaching method is exaggeration. But it is not really exaggeration when it comes to God. His mercy is that infinite for those who will humble themselves to ask for it. Can we ever repay him? Of course not! God's mercy to us is an infinity compared to zero. Our capacity to forgive others is quite limited in comparison. However, it is possible. We can do it! God asks us to give what we do have to offer. That is mercy to others. That's our sacrifice that is acceptable. Our sacrifice with the right spirit is as if we had tens of thousands of fat lambs. In other words and infinite sacrifice that could match what God gives us.

### **Call To Action**

Jesus comments on the Our Father, saying: If you forgive, your heavenly Father will forgive you but if you don't, he won't. The Our Father is actually saying that by limiting our forgiveness of others, we are the ones limiting the forgiveness we can receive.

Pray like the psalmist. Pray like Azariah. Pray like the parable servant. Trust in God's infinite mercy, no matter what we have done. Offer the same mercy to someone in our life. That's the law of mercy. That's the key to the kingdom of heaven.

## **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.*

**Psalms:** *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.*