

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

### **St Peter's 8:30am Mass - Tuesday, March 5, 2024**

**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** "Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave as I had mercy on you?"

### **Forgiveness Made Possible**

#### **Introduction**

We have two cycles of readings for weekday masses. But in Lent, the weekday readings are the same every year, so the church places a double emphasis on them. That does not likely surprise us when we hear of the famous parable about how many times we must forgive.

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.

#### **Matthew**

Just before this passage, Peter was given authority to forgive sins. That is why it is important that Peter be the one to ask the question, because he will be responsible for conveying to the church this law of mercy.

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. 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. But it's not just seven times. It's seventy seven times.  $7 \times 70$  is the difference between God's forgiveness of us and ours of others. It is infinite. In fact, it is as impossible for us to forgive even once a

wrong or offense that has been done to us as it is for that same camel from the other illustration of Jesus, to fit through the eye of the needle.

The Good News of Jesus Christ is in four stages. The first is that the infinite and perfect God of love created us only for the purpose of receiving his blessed life in us. The servant was given basically an infinite blessing, like what God has given us.

The second point of the Gospel message is that 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.

The third part phase is that after we, as God's servants, 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. 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.

The fourth step in the Good News is our 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**

Azariah summarizes the state of he and his people he compares to the sacrifice of tens of thousands of lambs. He is condemned to death by fire, a sign of the consequences for sin. For those who pursue holiness it is a purifying fire. For others it is torture. But Azariah stands still in the fire. He is focused, in a kind trance, passive, a submissive but powerful posture, not writhing in pain. He tells God what it is like for the people to be humbled, contrite spirit.

Bound hand and foot by order of the king of Babylon, 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. Their situation is entirely and absolutely beyond fixing. In the movies, something happens to save the heroes. But here there is nothing except the mercy of God. So it is with the Church.

From that place, 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**

Jesus is preparing us to feel the weight of our own situation as sinners and more deeply appreciate God's infinite mercy, not only to receive it but to offer it, in turn, to others. Jesus calls his disciples to a very high standard of mercy. We cannot speak words of forgiveness while harbouring resentment. Admittedly this is not always easy. Some injuries are so deep that it is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offense.

Unless we understand that infinity between God and us ... Unless we realize how far God bends down to us: to bless us with his life, to become one of us, his created beings, to die for our sins against God and each other, unless we realize and accept this, forgiving even once will be impossible. If we have the choice and without grace we will be grabbing the throats of those who owe us or have offended us.

Again this Lent we are reminded that we have to stand still. This Lent, we need to appreciate that God's mercy to us is without limit. 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 Nº 982) By this we can know that standing in the fire, 7 X 70 becomes possible. Not only that but our path 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.*

**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.*