



Fr. Bill Peckman 4/8/18
SS. Peter & Paul, Boonville
St. Joseph, Fayette

Pastor's Pen: On Divine Mercy

Every year, the Gospel for the Sunday Masses is always the same. There are very few Sunday Masses where this is the case. Every year it is a passage from the Gospel according to St. John, 20:19-31. The Gospel passage is drawn from the day of the Resurrection. It is the first meeting of the Risen Jesus with His apostles. Last week we saw the empty tomb. This week we see the primary reason Jesus came. We see why He becomes incarnate (becomes fully human while remaining fully divine), why He performs the great miracles and cures He does, why He preaches the Gospel, why He gives His Flesh and Blood at the Last Supper, why He submits to the Passion and Death, and why He rises from the dead. All of it is done because of God's earnest and loving desire to have us be eternally reconciled with Him. For this reason, the Sunday that ends the Octave of Easter (9 days of solemnity) focuses on divine mercy.

What is Mercy?

Mercy is the ability to grant something to another person that which they need without their deserving it. Mercy isn't payment for services rendered, mercy is help given regardless of the recipient's merit or ability to pay back. Divine mercy is this same ability, but on an infinite level. St. Paul reminds us that Christ died for us *while we were still sinners*. (Romans 5:8). The Father did not send His Son into this world when humanity finally got its act together. Humanity has estranged itself from God when it chose sin over God; when it chose to be its own God instead of God's child. This sin left a mark on the soul, a haunting absence of sanctifying grace known as original sin, which shut us out of heaven.

As God is love, as St. John reminds us in I John 4:8, He simply cannot bring Himself to write off His fallen creation. No matter how much He is provoked, ignored, dismissed, and wronged, God seeks to bring back to Himself humanity. The problem not was that it was God who had introduced division into the relationship. However, humanity in its fallen state could not rectify the damage it had done. God, thus, sent His Son, who while fully being God, now becomes fully human. God builds a bridge to reconciliation through His Son. It is the Son made flesh who would undo humanity's rebellion by His obedience to the Father's will. God shows His mercy to humanity through His Son's death and resurrection. As it is mercy that is divine in origin, it can bridge the gap created by sin.

The Heart of the Son

When Jesus meets His apostles in the upper room on the day of the Resurrection, the first words out of His mouth are going to be among the most important He speaks. His first words: "Peace be with you." Think about that. He is standing in a room with people He would have every reason to scold for their cowardice. Peter denied even knowing Him three times. The rest ran like a herd of scared deer. Their faith in witnessing the empty tomb is less than enthusiastic despite being told numerous times by Jesus that He would rise from the dead. Jesus' response to this group isn't well deserved derision. No, it is mercy.

He then says, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." He is still sending this lot out to change the world. Knowing they cannot do this on their own, he breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." This fragile and scared lot needed this Holy Spirit to get about the business of the Kingdom. What then is this mission? The mission is the heart of the reason why any of the Christ Event takes place. Jesus commissions them, "Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." The forgiveness of sins and the now newfound ability to be reconciled to God through that forgiveness of sin is at the very heart of what the Apostles and their successors would be charged with preaching until the end of time. Jesus wanted every successive generation to be able to experience the fullness of His mercy. The Death and Resurrection of Christ were meant to reverberate down through the millennia, calling fallen humanity back to its eternal source.

A Gift to be Accepted or Rejected

Mercy is offered by God as a great unmerited gift. Like all gifts given, the receptor must accept and use the gift. If the intended receptor rejects the gift or fails to use the gift, that is the fault of the receptor and not the giver. There are two concrete ways in which we are given these gifts of mercy.

The first way we are given this mercy is through baptism. In baptism, God restores the sanctifying grace in us that was lost through original sin. This great gift is meant to keep us in union with God. Parents who bring their children forward for baptism are committing themselves to raising their children to keep this sanctifying grace alive and operative in their hearts. The giving of the baptismal candle lit from the Paschal Candle (the symbol of the life and light of Christ) is symbolic of the reality of the mercy given.

We are given this grace for a reason. The second way we given this mercy is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. God's mercy demands a response of love on our part. That love has to be a free choice to love on our part. For it to be free, this means other options must be chosen against. We fight these urges to sin, known as concupiscence, with this grace given us. When we choose against that mercy and love by holding selfish motivations above God, we fall into sin. Some sin, known as venial sin, damages that relationship with God. It must be forgiven, but does not require a restoration of sanctifying grace. Some sin, known as mortal sin, severs the relationship with God and casts sanctifying grace from our souls. If by sacramental grace that sanctifying grace was first given, then by sacramental grace that it is restored. To this end, Jesus gives His apostles the duty, responsibility, and authority to forgive sins in His name. The apostles delegated this responsibility to their successors (aka bishops) and to the representatives of the bishops (aka priests) to continue this mission of Divine Mercy and the restoration it brings.

Choose Mercy; Be Merciful

The final component to Divine Mercy isn't that we are forgiven, grace restored, and we're done. No. As receptors of that mercy we are to be agents of that mercy. As we are forgiven and restored to relationship, so we are to forgive and restore relationships. In extending His mercy to His apostles, He sends the message to them they are to be agents of His mercy. It is difficult to be agent of mercy when we refuse mercy. It begins there. We should never allow the pride of thinking I do not need forgiveness nor the despair of believing I cannot be forgiven to get in the way of Divine Mercy. Having been receptors of this mercy, we are commanded to become the givers of Divine Mercy we have been called to be.