



Awake, you slumberers, from your sleep, and rouse yourselves from your lethargy. Search your deeds, return in repentance... Look to your souls, mend your ways and actions, leave your evil path and unworthy purpose, seek the way of the Lord.

January 14th

Second Ordinary Sunday

John 1:21-34

No Mercy? No Salvation!

There is a significant underappreciation of the idea of mercy in the Church today. It is something we can so easily rejoice in when we are its beneficiaries while simultaneously being parsimonious when it comes to sharing it with others. This suggests that while we are worthy recipients of mercy, others are not.

This, however, is not the way with Jesus the Christ of God. He showered mercy upon all who came to him in need. Take the example of Jesus and the demoniac (Mark 5). After completing the exorcism, the healed man begged to be able to follow Jesus. He had an experience of the mercy of God at work. The townsfolk, however, begged Jesus to leave their district. One may be tempted to think it was because they were not happy with mercy being shown to this man who had terrorised them for so long. They thought they knew the ways of God but now find the divine hand of mercy reaching out to this outcast. Mercy given freely threw them into confusion. Who would have believed this from *their* God?

The Status Quo is shaken by Jesus

This was a theological hand grenade thrown into the status quo of Judaism. The reality is that none of us knows how God is going to act or react to any given situation. There is no room in the church for that kind smugness where some feel they are close to God and righteous, while at the same time judging others to be less worthy of their mercy. As with the story of the demoniac, mercy applied without limits is sure to strike fear and uncertainty in the hearts of many.

The Church offers the medicine of divine mercy so that healed souls can grasp the truth that will liberate them in the fullest meaning of human freedom.

George Weigal

Mercy even for tax collectors!

Is this same message not proclaimed in the call of the tax collector Matthew? Having Jesus sit down with sinners was enough to send the Pharisees into conniptions. Yet is this not one of the fundamental themes of the Good News? When Jesus is pointing to Matthew and inviting him to “follow me”, he is at the same time pointing his finger at us. This is a key point to reach in the discipleship pilgrimage of every Christian. When called we are no different to Matthew. We need to trust in the mercy of God who calls even sinners into His Kingdom. God’s mercy is infinite, His patience beyond all human comprehension and He expects we view others in the same vein.

What Jesus did throughout His ministry was to find in all men and women signs of the image and likeness of God – even when they might be viewed by their peers as being despicable. That demands a fair level of divine grace because all can slip into acting as though mercy is something for others but is not something I need for myself. How wrong they are.

The Truth is that we are all sinners, all in need of divine mercy and all called to pass that same gift of undeserved mercy to others – just as God showered underserved mercy onto me. To deny this means we consider ourselves to be beyond the need of salvation. It also renders us incapable of seeing the face of God in those around us, particularly in the *tax collectors and sinners*.

This is where the divine hand grenade is thrown into the life of the church. Those who appear to people (in word or in action) to be religiously superior to others are, are unable to see and celebrate the abundant mercy God has made available to them in their sins. They do not acknowledge their need and so do not humble

themselves before the heavenly throne praying^{what} “Lord have mercy on me a sinner”.

This narrative of the call of Matthew reassures us that when God looks upon us, He is not looking at our past, our social standing or the way in which we fit into the religious conventions of our Church. What Jesus is in fact doing is opening up for these sinners a whole new future. He is reminding them of the way the Kingdom of God is made up of sinners on the way, on a journey. It is not a community of the perfect. This biblical story highlights how these people are following Jesus precisely because they are able to acknowledge their sins and their need for divine mercy. Pope Francis once wrote on how the Church is called to be *a school of humility which opens us to grace*.

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Keeping our eyes on the big picture

The thing about mercy is that it is a spiritual gift that can be experienced only in words and deeds. It is not like some award we have won and is left hanging on a wall. In this, we find another major area in which we, as Church, can find ourselves lacking. We believe that in Jesus Christ we are saved. In turn, we must move beyond ourselves and share that mercy with other people. At a pastoral level, that requires us to live in the world with an intent to bring healing to those who suffer. All too often our church thinking and acting gets caught up in

small things, what we are permitted to do and

in what is forbidden. The parable of the Good Samaritan sets a radically different kind of agenda. The focus of that parable is on the healing of wounds and on the need to accompany the suffering on their journeys. Any other priority would put us into the same category as that of the priest and the Levite.

**Teach me to feel another's woe, to hide the fault I see,
that mercy I to others show, that mercy show to me.**

Alexander Pope

- Alexander Pope

The shocking part of this parable is the way it avoids any form of moralizing and stresses only the shared humanity we all share in Christ. The one way we can be the fully alive people we were created to be is through the fulfilment of the command to love. We cannot be indifferent to the suffering of others and we must not allow others to continue in life feeling like outcasts. If we feel our world is wounded, we cannot sit back and be “tut-tutters”. We must work on bringing healing.

God's mercy to us is the motivation for showing mercy to others. Remember, you will never be asked to forgive someone else more than God has forgiven you.

Rick Warren

The passers-by were both religious people. Noting this is essential for us because it re-enforces the truth that being a church-going Christian does not guarantee our life is acceptable to God. As with these passers-by, we can deceive ourselves that we are close to God, closer than those others. In truth, the only one acceptable to God here was the heretic Samaritan. The only way we can be assured of our closeness to God is through gifting mercy to others. Why is this so? It is because mercy is the grace of God poured out onto those who are undeserving. It is the gift of love to those who by every earthly measure are considered unworthy of such a gift.

Mercy is an act of love towards people who hurt us. Merciful people show compassion, sympathize, and are patient, they are kind, and tender-hearted. They are moved to care for the poor and disadvantaged. They imitate Christ.