

## 31<sup>st</sup> Sun C... God's Mercy

### **Introduction**

Today I would like to reflect on the Mercy of God as we come toward the end of this Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis.

Today's first reading from the Book of Wisdom describes our loving God:

*... But you have mercy on all... and you overlook people's sins that they may repent. For you love all things that are and loathe nothing you have made.*

*(Wisdom 11)*

In today's Gospel we have Jesus showering God's mercy on a sinful Zacchaeus. Let's look at the Gospel.

### **I Zacchaeus**

Zacchaeus is a tax collector... someone hated and shunned by the Jewish people of Jesus' time because he worked for pagan Rome. In collecting the taxes he also cheated his own people who had to pay taxes to Rome.

Zacchaeus hears Jesus coming with a crowd and is curious. He wants to get a look at this supposed prophet and wonder-worker. His encounter with Jesus changes his life... something happens as Jesus calls Zacchaeus to come down out of that tree. Something in Zacchaeus' hardened heart breaks. He repents his sinfulness. Jesus touches him with God's mercy. Jesus even dines with him...

I am reminded of Revelation 12:20...

*Behold I stand at the door and knock and if anyone opens the door I will come in with them and dine with them and they with me.*

Is *your* heart hardened in any way? Perhaps past regrets, present guilts, resentments and angers...

How much baggage do we carry around that tends to harden our hearts?

Do you realize your need for God's mercy?"?

Did Zacchaeus?

He was curious...

He came to Jesus...

He repented of his sinfulness.

he became a changed man.

What do we need to repent of?

What hurtful baggage do you take to the Lord to heal?

Have you experienced God's mercy?

## **II Jesus, the Mercy of God**

Pope Francis in the opening paragraphs of his Proclamation of a Year of Mercy beginning in December of 2015 states:

*1. Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy... Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father (cf. Jn 14:9). Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions, and his entire person reveal the mercy of God.*

Pope Francis has spoken of God's mercy many times this year. On New Year's Day Francis describes the many miseries of our world, but goes on to say:

*A torrent of misery, swollen by sin, seems to contradict the fullness of time brought by Christ... And yet this swollen torrent is powerless before the ocean of mercy which floods our world...*

He then adds:

*All of us are called to immerse ourselves in this ocean, to let ourselves be reborn.*

In a talk Francis gave on March '15 he says:

*Among the Sacraments, certainly Reconciliation renders present with particular efficacy the merciful face of God: it is constantly and ceaselessly made real and manifest. Let us never forget, both as penitents and confessors: there is no sin that God cannot forgive. None! Only that which is withheld from divine mercy cannot be forgiven, just as one who withdraws from the sun can be neither illuminated nor warmed.*

My own experience in hearing confessions at St. Paul's Monastery often shows me God's mercy in people's lives as they come to confession seeking God's healing and forgiveness.

## **III Our Job**

Here's a question for you, one you might seldom ask yourself:

Who is Jesus... to you?

We have our catechism answers...

We know what we've been taught...

But who is Jesus personally to you?

Have you experienced Jesus' mercy in your life?

What do *you* admire about Jesus?

What are your favorite stories about Jesus?

The story of Zachaeus,

the story of the Prodigal Son, receiving mercy from his forgiving father,

the story of the Good Samaritan, mercifully treated by a passing stranger?

the story of the Shepherd searching for the lost sheep to bring that sheep home to safety.

So many stories of Jesus showing us God's mercy.

We forget the stories... we forget the teachings and words of Jesus... we seldom hold them in our minds and hearts. Our minds and hearts are so full of clutter.

Mother Theresa of Calcutta described prayer as 'making room for God in our hearts'.

Do we do this every day?

Or is our day cluttered with worries, fears, resentments, angers, guilts, regrets...

Can we take these to the mercy of Jesus?

For some people Jesus is only a Sunday occurrence...

someone "up there" whom we approach on Sundays...

but basically forgotten the rest of the week?

For us disciples of Jesus this is not the case.

*We are Jesus' disciples –*

*We are Jesus' disciples and so Jesus is important to us.*

In Paul's beautiful Letter to the Hebrews Paul encourages the early Christians:

*Keep your eyes on Jesus,*

*who both began and finished this race we're in.*

*Study how he did it. (The Message, Heb 12:2)*

**Conclusion:**

My friends, at this Eucharist we keep our eyes on Jesus.

Today we recall one of the beautiful stories about Jesus.

We see Jesus' compassion and mercy.

Then we look at our lives and ask, 'What do I bring to Jesus for his healing touch, his merciful love'?

At communion time we invite Jesus into our hearts and ask for his mercy and strength, especially as we live in a world that at seems at times to be so dark and angry and dangerous.

Then we ask Jesus to help us to bring his mercy and compassion into our world.

The prayer of St. Francis says it so well...

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me bring love,

Where there is despair, hope,

Where there is darkness, light,

Where there is anger and resentment, forgiveness,

Where there is envy and greed, gratitude and sharing,

Where there is lust, mature caring and loving relationships,

Where there is arrogance, a humble understanding of our own worthwhileness, and the goodness of others,