

4th Sunday Lent Year “B”

God, who is Rich in Mercy

March 15, 2015- Laetare Sunday

Readings: 2 Chronicles 36: 14-16, 19-23; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 3: 14-21

A fairly constant theme of the now two-year pontificate of Pope Francis has been the emphasis on the need to give and receive mercy. In a Penance Service sponsored by the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization this past Friday, the Holy Father expressed his intention to proclaim a year of Mercy for 2016. It will begin on December 8th and continue until the beginning of the new liturgical year the following November of 2016.

In doing this, he desires to express in a more profound way, the riches of mercy found in our faith and in the person of Jesus Christ. Does God, Who is rich in mercy, care about our troubles? In his homily last Friday

To be touched with tenderness by His hand and shaped by His grace allows us, therefore, to approach the priest without fear for our sins, but with the certainty of being welcomed by him in the name of God, and understood notwithstanding our miseries. Coming out of the confessional, we will feel God’s strength, which restores life and returns the enthusiasm of faith.¹

The title of Pope John Paul II’s second encyclical, “Rich in Mercy,” was taken from this very scriptural passage, so these teachings are nothing new, and yet they remain fundamental for us. Do we ourselves feel that we really need to show mercy to others or do we see it as a sign of showing weakness? St. John Paul II rhetorically asked in his encyclical: “Did not Christ say that our Father, who ‘sees in secret,’ is always waiting for us to have recourse to Him in every need and always waiting for us to study His mystery: the mystery of the Father and His love?”²

¹ Pope Francis, Basilica of St. Peter, Homily at Penance Service, 13 March 2015

² Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia*, 1980; paragraph #2

Mercy extends well beyond the door of the confessional. In our daily lives, mercy is shown by the manner in which we relate to one another, the degree to which we hold grudges, forgive others or allow them to have a fresh start. If we hold onto our anger, it will soon overcome us; we may even forget exactly why we are angry or hurt, rather only that we are angry or hurt. What possible good can come from that?

Holding on to past hurts feels good, but only for a brief moment; in fact, we are left with little else than emptiness. Clearly, following a horrible injustice, we may justifiably feel righteous anger, anger that is not sinful, but based on a sense of the virtue of justice. We ought to be angry when we see the television reports about the plight of Christians and others subjected to the brutality of ISIS.

At the same time, even our righteous anger can turn very quickly into unrighteous anger, if we allow it to dominate us, or if we unjustly allow our anger to be directed to others who bear no responsibility for the atrocities. Equally important, if we allow anger to grow deeper in our hearts, we will become depressed. Sometimes depression has been described as “anger turned inward.” Elsewhere in Ephesians, Saint Paul gives sage advice: “Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun set on your anger.”

In our second reading today, we pray that God “might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” One way that we discover these immeasurable riches of His grace is by disposing ourselves to hear his voice, to listen to Him speaking to us in and through the Holy Eucharist. These must be the riches for which we pine every day. Let us never give up hope; rather, let us see the source of our hope, not in any perishable crown, but in the crown that lasts forever.