

Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Easter

Last Sunday, the universal Church celebrated the feast of Divine Mercy – that beautiful devotion revealed to us through St. Faustina Kowalska, which recalls for us how Jesus comes to us now as our merciful Savior. We spoke then about what mercy is – namely God’s divine compassion or pity upon us. It’s the principal way that God looks upon us – the wounded sinners that we are. Well, since St. Faustina’s diary, through which we learn about this Divine Mercy, is 600 pages long, I thought that one homily just wasn’t enough. So this week I’d like to dig a little deeper, and share the following analogy with you. When a little child falls down and scrapes his or her knee and is hurt, mom or dad often comes rushing over and scoops the child up, compassionately attending to the little one. So too does God, our heavenly Father, do for us in His mercy. We have all given into temptation and fallen into sin of all degrees and types. Those sins, as we know, ultimately deserve God’s justice, which rightly requires punishment for our evil deeds. However, in the person of Jesus, God Himself willingly and lovingly takes that punishment upon Himself in His death upon the cross. In this divine sacrifice, God Himself pays the price of justice so that He can have mercy upon us. So, when we fall down into sin and scrape our souls and mess up our lives, God in His divine mercy hears us when we cry out to Him and scoops us up, and compassionately attends to us in our woundedness.

This crying out to God to save us from our sins and help us we call repentance. And our Scripture readings today are chocked full of references to repentance. For example, in the first reading, St. Peter speaking to all the people after Jesus' Resurrection on Easter Sunday proclaims to them: "Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away." And Jesus, appearing to His disciples on the evening of Easter Sunday reminds them of His earlier promise when He walked the earth with them: "Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

My brothers and sisters, God lavishes His mercy upon us when we repent of our sins – when we call out to Him for forgiveness. The word mercy in Latin is 'misericordia', which is composed of two smaller words, 'cor' and 'miseri'. 'Cor' is the Latin word for "heart", from which we get our word "coronary". And 'miseri' is the word for "those suffering". We get our English words "miserable" and "misery" from this word. What this essentially means is that misericordia, or mercy, is us personally experiencing the compassion and the tender pity from the depths of God's heart that He has for us poor, suffering sinners. But, without repentance, we cannot experience mercy. In fact, if we do not cry out to God in repentance, then we are like a child who falls and hurts himself – but, rather than crying out for help, runs off to be alone, and sulks, and gets angry.

Pope Francis himself has spoken volumes on the absolute necessity for mercy in our lives. He himself, at the age of 16, after going to Confession as a teenage boy back in 1953, spoke of his own personal experience of God's mercy that changed his heart and convinced him to become a priest. Imagine if Pope Francis never had that experience of mercy that led him to be a priest, and eventually pope! Similarly, what might we be missing out on by not experiencing God's mercy more often? Pope Francis has even gone so far to say that mercy "is the name of our God"! He (and I include myself here, too) is so convinced of the repentance the world needs to come to in order to experience God's healing and liberating mercy. In fact, beginning on the feast of the Immaculate Conception in December of this year and stretching all the way to the feast of Christ the King in 2016, Pope Francis has declared a special Jubilee Year focusing on mercy. In this regard the Holy Father stated: "How greatly I desire that all those places where the Church is present, especially our parishes and our communities, may become islands of mercy in the midst of the sea of indifference...[for] our world is deeply wounded by its alienation from God...[but] in offering healing, the Church is opening ways for humanity to come to him."

Ultimately, mercy an undeserved gift from God that each of us needs to receive time and time again. It is the primary way that God views each of His children. And because of this, it is also the lens through which we need to view ourselves and others – desperately in need of mercy, by which our hearts are healed of the suffering caused by sin. God bless you.