

HOM 24th Sunday 2019 C Sept 15

Divine Mercy can be understood simply as the time, opportunity, and grace God gives us to live absolutely, definitively, and eternally, in oneness with Him.

God's mercy is featured in today's Scripture readings which taken together show us that Divine mercy is a many-splendored thing, and even complex insofar as it does not negate or override the demands of justice.

Mercy's complexity relating to justice can be derived from our first reading where, at Moses' appeal, God relented of the punishment He had threatened to inflict on the Israelites when they fashioned a golden calf to be their idol – their god --and worshipped it. What God had threatened was to consume them, that is to say, to completely wipe them out – about 2.4 million people.

Instead, at Moses' behest, all the members of the tribe of Levi – the Levites -- who immediately repented and pledged loyalty to Moses and the one true God, slew about three thousand of their fellow Israelites, including the own kinsmen (Exodus 32: 25-29) who may have been the organizers of the idolatry that had taken place.

Additionally, God told Moses that He would punish the others who had participated in the idolatry. "*When it is time for me to punish,*" the Lord said, "*I will punish them for their sin.*" (Exodus 32: 34)

Punishment can be both a demand of justice and an act of mercy. When it is administered or allowed to persuade a person to freely live in oneness with God, it is an act of mercy, called a chastisement or discipline. When it gives a person who has definitively rejected oneness with God what they want, it is the fulfillment of justice because the person has a God-given right to separate from God forever.

We can see, for example, how capital punishment can be both chastisement for a person who in the face of death repents and is saved from eternal death, OR the realization of justice which gives the person the permanent separation from God he or she definitively seeks, resulting in self-inflicted eternal suffering.

The second reading and Gospel reading focus on some of the dimensions of God's mercy. Saul, for example, self-described as a blasphemer, a persecutor of Christians, and arrogant, is given the grace both to know that Jesus Christ is God and to live in oneness with Him. His heart had not been hardened to God, only misguided by ignorance. And the grace of the Holy Spirit he was given by the Lord enlightened his mind and he then gratefully acted on this – as fully as possible to atone for his wrongdoing – thus accepting God's mercy and satisfying the requirements of justice during the course of his life with his heroic work of love.

St. Stephen, the first martyr of the Church – stoned to death by a Saul-led crowd of Christian persecutors, may have been a contributor to Saul's conversion. The Christlike manner of

Stephen's death suggests he may have offered his sufferings and death for Saul, the instigator of his being stoned. If so, it was this act of mercy that may have led to Jesus' outpouring of grace to Saul when He blinded him on the road to Damascus and said "Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9: 4)

The three Gospel parables today highlight even more aspects of Divine Mercy. In the parable of the two sons, we see that God allows even his sons or daughters to walk away from Him. He does not hold anyone hostage or force them to live in oneness with Him – even though He infinitely desires that they do. And so, the younger son has to come to his senses and return freely.

And when He does, the eagerness and the joy and the all-out celebration called for by His Father – and his immediate restoration of his wayward son to full sonship – expresses the intensity of His love for him and the quickness with which He extends mercy to him.

The parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin emphasize yet another attribute of divine mercy. God not only extends time, opportunity, and grace to every person who does not know Him or turns away from Him, He also actively seeks out that person. The sending of His Son unto the Cross to win Man to oneness with God is God's ultimate reaching out to Man. And this is not just to Mankind, but to each and every person, through the Church.

And those who respond and freely accept the sublime gift of oneness with God not only say YES to His mercy, they also say YES to the Cross which, while it is the perfection of obedience and reciprocal love, is also the requirement of justice that is at the same time fulfilled.

Today's readings pose several self-exam questions. Based on the first reading, we do well to ask ourselves: Do I, like Moses, appeal to God to have mercy on others who have sinned? Based on the second reading, we could ask: Am I grateful for the mercy God has extended to me, and so, do I work extra-fervently to lead others to oneness with Him. The question for us, brothers and sisters, from the Gospel parables is: "***Are we willing to embrace the Cross of obedience and love -- not just for our own true good – our own oneness with God in Jesus Christ -- but are we willing to offer ourselves to and with Jesus to the Father unto the Cross for the true good of others – AND TO SEEK THEM OUT*** -- not just those we hold dear – but all others – all whom the Father holds dear? If the answer is YES, then we must be willing to be solicitous for the salvation of every single person we encounter or know or know of, both prayerfully and practically, as the Holy Spirit prompts us.

If the answer is NO, then like the older son in the Gospel parable of the Two Sons – the one who was surly and resentful at the merciful welcome His Father gave to his brother on his return home – we, too, must become MORE like God and Father and God the Son *than we are now*.

If you want that for yourselves and out of love for others, then you may want to join me silently in your heart in saying this Eucharistic Self-Offering Prayer at Holy Communion: I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS THROUGH MARY YOUR MOTHER.