

Lenten Reflection 2011

GO AND LEARN THE MEANING OF THE WORDS, 'I DESIRE MERCY NOT SACRIFICE.'

Matt 9:13

GATHERING PRAYER [Clergy or, if no clergy is present, the group facilitator leads the participants into this Lenten observance with this prayer]:

Prayer for God's Mercy and Fidelity

Father, infinitely merciful and ever-faithful,
you formed us in your own image and likeness.
Though we forgot your goodness and sinned against you,
you saved us by the blood of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.
We implore you, God of mercy and love,
forgive us, heal us, strengthen us, and transform us.
Help us to be merciful and faithful,
as you are merciful and faithful.

Lord Jesus, you desire mercy not sacrifice.
During this Lenten Season and always,
accept our penance, prayer and fasting;
accept our almsgiving and other works of mercy.
Join them to your Passion by the grace of your Holy Spirit,
so that having transformed and united us in your Perfect Sacrifice,
we may faithfully continue your work of salvation of the world,
with the help of our Blessed Mother, Mary – all for the glory of your name. Amen.

GETTING FOCUSED: [At the beginning of each session, the facilitator reads slowly the following passage from the Gospel of Matthew. Participants are allowed a few minutes to reflect on its meaning and to probe the heart. They then answer privately the questions that follow. Participants are free to share relevant insights and the facilitator leads the discussion.]

GOSPEL OF MATTHEW (all stand)

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew

9:9-13

⁹ As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. ¹⁰ While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ The Pharisees saw this and said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹² He heard this and said, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. ¹³ Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

The Gospel of the Lord

(all sit)

REFLECTION:

[The facilitator initiates and encourages group discussion with the following questions]

“While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples.” (Matt 9:10)

You have been invited to a heavenly banquet with Jesus, his mother Mary, and all the angels and saints. As you enter the heavenly banquet hall, you search for your table and find your place card.

- † Whom do you hope will be also seated at your table?
- † Looking around, is there a special someone in your life who has not yet arrived?
- † Are there others who might not be able to make it to the banquet on their own; others who may be in need of your assistance?
- † Ask yourself, “Is there anything I can do to hasten their arrival?”

[Questions for deeper reflection]

- † Have you ever actually experienced this gift of God’s grace; the opportunity to sit at table with Jesus and his disciples, his mother Mary and all the saints?
- † How did you last you experience the Holy Mass?
- † Who was with you at the last heavenly banquet you attended?
- † Was there anyone in your life not at the table?
- † Was someone in need of your assistance; someone who might be struggling; someone who might not be able to make it on his own; her own?
- † Ask yourself, “is there anything I can do to hasten their arrival?”
- † On this occasion, was there anyone in particular with whom you did not care to sit? (Is there need for reconciliation?)

A QUOTATION from: *Indulgences, Reservoir of Grace*

“Indulgences cancel or lessen our temporal punishment, console us before God, encourage us to go frequently to the sacraments. Indulgences help us grow in holiness and discipleship and closer union with Christ. They help us to follow the commandments of God faithfully, and perform spiritual and corporal works of mercy in a diligent manner. Indulgences enable us to participate with Christ in the work of our own salvation and the salvation of souls in purgatory. We share and contribute in the great work of Christ’s salvation for the world.” (10)

- † What are the spiritual and corporal works of mercy? (see CCC 2447)
- † What are some ‘lay-ministries’ of the apostolate that might be considered works of mercy?
- † Are there any charitable acts infused with the Christian spirit that could not be considered works of mercy? Are there any such charitable acts that might not bring indulgences?

- † Ordering our lives to the perfection of charity – while patiently and prayerfully enduring the hardships of life and faithfully carrying out our duties – how does performing works of mercy help us to obtain indulgences for ourselves and for souls in purgatory? (see CCC 1474-75)

“I can obtain indulgences for myself and for the souls in purgatory.” (4)

- † By the grace of God and with the help of the Church, works of mercy can help us obtain indulgences for ourselves and for souls in purgatory. Why do you think we cannot obtain indulgences for persons still living? (see CCC 1478)
- † Even though we cannot obtain indulgences for persons still living, can we perform works of mercy to their benefit?
- † How might works benefit others temporally and/or spiritually? (see CCC 2447)

[One (or different participants) reads each of the following OT, NT and Gospel texts slowly for all to hear and between each reading, allows a moment of quiet to reflect on its meaning and to probe the heart.]

OLD TESTAMENT READING: Genesis 12:1-4
(The call of Abraham, the father of God’s people.)

NEW TESTAMENT READING: 2 Timothy 1:8-10
(God has saved us and called us to be holy.)

THE HOLY GOSPEL: Mathew 17:1-9
(His face shone like the son.)

LENTEN REFLECTIONS - Bishop Alvaro Corrada, S.J.:

[The facilitator broadcasts the audio-video presentation by Most Reverend Alvaro Corrada, S.J., Bishop of Tyler, speaking on the topic of: God’s Mercy and Fidelity]

“Mercy is built upon faith. It’s not that we do things for God; it’s that we do things with God because God is with us... God calls us to a life of hope; to holiness; to be like him. ... This call... is a call for you and me; for all of humanity to move forward in a journey of mercy, not sacrifice; in a journey that is built on fidelity, on the strength of the human person encountering the Eternal God.”

- † Now in the second week of the Lenten Season, can you say that your personal Lenten observance – a response to God’s call – has moved you forward in a journey of mercy, not sacrifice? Has it moved you forward in a journey that is built on fidelity; on strength that comes by an encounter with God? How so? If not, what might you do to alter your course?
- † Can we obtain indulgences on our own or by our own power? How do you read CCC 1474?

“The human person transformed and transfigured in Christ encounters the divine and is pulled into the divine. This is what mercy means: In the excitement of life that calls you

in the midst of all the depressions and difficulties and sickness; of all the tests that you can go through, you have to respond.”

- † Based on what we have learned in our reading of *Indulgences, Reservoir of Grace*, what is our response as Catholic disciples of Jesus?
- † How might we give positive value to all our trials and tribulations, our difficulties in life, our pain and suffering?

“The experience of God transforms the human person. Do not be afraid to be transformed... ‘Be not afraid’... It is Jesus calling you into the realm of holiness, into the realm of the divine, the realm of mercy not sacrifice. The human person stands with Jesus Christ – who is truly God and truly man on the cross – who is the sacrifice of God himself. So, we have to take on the divine power of mercy and fidelity over (mere) sacrifice and living just by law.”

- † How do you understand Bishop Corrada’s comment (above) as it pertains to your personal Lenten observance of penance, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and works of mercy?
- † Ask yourself: “Has my personal observance of Lent opened my heart to the magnitude of transformation Jesus offers?”

CONCLUSION: As we go our separate ways and until we come back together again, let each of us continue to ask what Jesus means when he says: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.”

CLOSING PRAYER:

Father, you call us to a life of hope,
to a life of holiness in Baptism,
to be like you in mercy and fidelity.
We beg you, transform us.

Lord Jesus, you call us into the realm of holiness,
into the realm of the divine,
into the realm of mercy, not sacrifice.
We beg you, help us take on the divine power of mercy and fidelity.

Most Holy Spirit, you lead us on a journey of mercy, not sacrifice.
Then, lead us on a journey built on fidelity;
a journey of encounter with the Eternal God.
We beg you, give us strength.

On this our journey,
grant us the constant company of Mary, Our Blessed Mother.
We beg you, let us be not afraid.
Amen.