Divine Mercy Sunday 2024

“Lord, let Your mercy be upon us, as we place our trust in You.”

*(Psalm 33)*

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. As the Father has sent Me, so I send you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”

The Cenacle, a simple room on the upper floor of a building in old Jerusalem is populated with Christian memories. But above all, it is the place of a presence that is repeated in many other rooms around the world. There, the Eucharist was celebrated, the priesthood was conferred, the Holy Spirit was given, the sacrament of Reconciliation was offered to humanity.

The encounter of the Risen Lord with the disciples has as its center a phrase that has within it an extraordinary gift, “to forgive sins.” Jesus breathed on them gift of the Holy Spirit *“on the evening of that first day,”* on the same day of His resurrection. The mystery of the Incarnation culminates in the death and resurrection of Christ. Jesus is the most eloquent witness of mercy; never vague in His proclamation of God’s mercy. Bestowing mercy manifests the Lord’s infinite abundance and generosity.

Our world is increasingly inclined to cover the sense of sin, to dull the moral conscience, to throw layers of dust on the embers of sincere remorse. We might experience “feelings of guilt.” We might fall into the tangles of “guilt complexes.” To seek liberation from guilt, in a total radical way, is possible only for God. Our only hope of forgiveness is the mercy of God. To forgive sins is the exclusive prerogative of God. *“Blessed is the one whose guilt is forgiven, for the Lord is gracious and merciful and just.”*

Jesus reveals mercy in His everyday relations with people: when Jesus confronts the crowd about to stone the woman taken in adultery, when He meets the Samaritan woman at the well, when He weeps with the others mourners at the death of Lazarus, and ultimately when He takes up the cross laden with the sins of the world and is led to His death.

God’s mercy is manifest in the Church, being the fruit of the Paschal Mystery, preaching and confessing mercy, recalling it and imitating it, realizing it and making it present in the sacrament of salvation. It is the channel of God’s eternal mercy for the world. “We need to contemplate the mystery of mercy,” Pope Francis says, in his encyclical, *The Face of Mercy,* “it is the well-spring of joy, serenity and peace. Our salvation depends on it.” Mercy is seen as an active and creative love, the ultimate act “by which God comes to meet us, the bridge that connects God and human beings, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.” This is mercy experienced in Scriptures, in the theology of the Church and in the lives of the saints.

God who is merciful expects mercy from us, an active love among the people, expressed in helping others, forbidding uncontrolled revenge and demanding a forgiving attitude. Mercy is a test of authenticity of our faith: *“Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful,”* (Luke). St Paul tells about faith expressing itself through love (Galatians), compassion (Philippians), and kindness (Ephesians). This is what qualifies us to eternal life (Matthew). The gift of the Holy Spirit is a manifests God’s mercy, for it makes a person a *new* person, and through *new* people, a *new* world—a civilization of love.

St Thomas Aquinas says that the way of eternal salvation, that frees one from the slavery of sin, is opened for humans. God draws good in a person from present evil, that sin need not have the final say. Mercy appears to be the power of God who acts in the way that does not give the final say even to one’s sin. Mercy offers an opportunity for conversion, repentance, and forgiveness of sin. That’s why Pope Francis calls the Church to evangelize: “May the message of mercy reach everyone, and may no one be indifferent to the call to experience mercy. I direct this invitation to conversion even more fervently to those whose behavior distances them from the grace of God” (The Face of Mercy).

Mercy should characterize every day as God’s grace is constantly extended over the world. Aware of so many contradictions in the world, let us pray to the Lord in this litany, and respond:

*“Lord, You lead, I’ll follow, because I trust in You.”*

Let wheat and weeds grow together:

Let Arabs and Jews in Palestine grow together:

Let Catholics and Protestants grow together:

Let Pros and Contras of Central America grow together:

Let Documented and Undocumented refugees grow together:

Let Immigrants and Native Americans grow together:

Let black and whites grow together:

Let Sikhs and Hindus of India grow together:

Let revolutionaries and reactionaries grow together:

Let Russians and Ukrainians grow together:

Let Christians prone to boasts and betrayals grow together:

Let people who wound and heal grow together:

Let the rich and poor, humble and haughty, grow together:

Let those whose thinking is similar and contrary grow together:

Let those whose feelings are transparent or concealed grow together:

Let joys and sorrows, laughter and tears grow together:

Let strength and weakness grow together:

Let doubt and faith grow together:

Let denial and commitment grow together:

Let virtue and vice grow together:

Let contemplation and action grow together:

Let giving and receiving grow together:

Let the helpful and the helpless grow together:

Experiencing God’s grace draws us to show mercy to others, the most perfect incarnation of equality between people, an indispensable gift for shaping mutual relationships, in a spirit of deep respect for what is human and divine, in a spirit of brotherhood. Undertaking the work of mercy was modeled for us by our Seraphic Father, St Francis. Mercy’s measure is not the strength of one’s emotion, but one’s specific action, motivated by a transformative and healing grace. Pope Francis calls the Church to this world-transforming mercy, the very foundation of the Church’s life, credibly seen in how its members show merciful and compassionate love.

