

2nd Sunday of Easter, Cycle C April 11, 2010

Readings: Acts 5:12-16; Revelation 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19; John 20:19-31

ABCs of Mercy

This morning we hear Jesus say: *“Peace be with you.”* And: *“Do not be afraid.”* This morning we hear about God’s forgiveness and mercy.

We are at peace when we receive forgiveness from God in the Sacrament of Penance; the sacrament that we hear instituted in our gospel story. And we have nothing to fear if we put our complete trust in God’s mercy.

Today is the Second Sunday of Easter; it the eighth and final day that we celebrate Easter Sunday. We continue to celebrate the Resurrection as if it happened today. But today is also Divine Mercy Sunday; a feast instituted ten years ago by Pope John Paul II. While the feast had only been celebrated for ten years, there is a long history in the Church of celebrating Easter week as a week to remember God’s mercy.

In our second reading this morning, we hear how Jesus appeared to the apostle John in a vision on the island of Patmos where John was in exile for preaching the Good News. Jesus said to him: *“Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever. I hold the keys to death and the netherworld.”* Jesus rules over the netherworld, the abode of the dead, and He can temper His justice with His mercy to allow souls to have their punishment in purgatory reduced. Today is a special day to reflect on God’s mercy and to ask God to be merciful to ourselves and to our loved ones, living and deceased. I thought today would be a good day to remind everyone of the ABCs of mercy.

We start with the letter A which reminds us to *ask for God’s mercy*. Jesus said: *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”* We start by putting aside our pride and humbly admitting our need for God’s mercy. If we don’t recognize how our sinfulness has caused damage to the Body of Christ, and how our actions have offended God, we will not ask God for mercy. And that would be a shame because God is so generous in offering it.

A few weeks ago we had the gospel parable of the prodigal son. The son hit rock bottom and decided to come home and ask his father for forgiveness. But the son not only received forgiveness, he also received mercy which he had not expected. The father not only forgave the son, but also did not give him the punishment he deserved. And so it can be with God. Sometimes it is only later in our lives when we come to our senses like the prodigal son, look back over all the bad decisions in our lives, and truly appreciate our need for God’s mercy. There are many in our world, however, who have come to deny that sin even exists. And so we pray and ask for God’s mercy, not only for ourselves, but also those who might not know to ask themselves. We pray for God’s mercy for our family, our friends, our country, and for the whole world.

Next we have the letter B which reminds us to *be merciful* to others. It is a reminder that if we want God to be merciful to us, then we must be merciful to others. Forgiveness and mercy go hand-in-hand but they are not the same thing. We may extend forgiveness to a criminal, but he is still required to serve the appropriate sentence. Extending mercy is analogous to reducing or

eliminating the criminal's sentence. When a punishment that is deserved is reduced, this is mercy. We pray in the Our Father, "***Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.***" And this same mandate that applies to forgiveness also applies to mercy.

Jesus said, "***Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.***" And He talked about the last judgment and said: "***Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'***"

Being merciful is when we perform acts for others, not because they are required or deserved or even expected, but simply because the person who receives the action is a child of God. These are acts of love, acts of charity. Performing acts of mercy helps the other person, but it inherently benefits the person performing the act as well. We cannot truly offer mercy without receiving mercy in return. John Paul II said in his encyclical Rich in Mercy: "***We are able with all humility to show mercy to others, knowing that Christ accepts it as if it were shown to Himself.***"

And our last letter is C, which is a little bit of a stretch, but which officially stands for completely trusting in God's mercy. I like to propose that instead the letter C stand for conversion. It is our decision to put our trust in God and let Him be in control of our lives. Conversion is about trust and surrender, and in doing so we throw ourselves at God feet and ask for mercy on us, His unworthy servants.

Jesus said: "***Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf of bread, or a snake when he asks for a fish? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him.***"

St. Faustina was canonized ten years ago. She received messages from God asking that devotion be renewed to His Divine Mercy. She wrote a comprehensive diary which contained these messages and also her reflections and prayers she composed. I would like to close with one of those prayers.

"O Jesus, eternal Truth, strengthen my feeble forces; You can do all things, Lord. I know that without You all my efforts are in vain. O Jesus do not hide from me, for I cannot live without You. Listen to the cry of my soul. Your mercy has not been exhausted, Lord, so have pity on my misery. Your mercy surpasses the understanding of all Angels and people put together; and so, although it seems to me that You do not hear me, I put my trust in the ocean of Your mercy, and I know that my hope will not be deceived."

Peace be with you. Do not be afraid.

Deacon Joe Hulway