

MERCY – a Parish Mission

Pope Francis beginning December 8 proclaimed 2016 as a year of Mercy, Reflecting on the world situation, beginning in our own USA, the tragedy of abuse, violence, human persecution and destruction we see the critical need for a renewal of heart. Mercy is demonstrated by the qualities of compassion and forbearance, As Catholic it is vital as one lives the message of the Gospel to review ones thoughts, attitudes and consequent behaviors to determine whether the Gospel message is foundational in all relationships whether those relationships are personal or not.

As one listens to the news are ones internal reactions toward the evils described that are imbedded in persons and cultures create a compassionate understanding that is rooted in a loving God? How do we practice the virtue of loving kindness when we are not aware of the angers, hatred and prejudice that has built up over time? Have we learned the gracious discipline of prayer to invite the holy Jesus at Eucharist into our sinful heart to break down and heal our own violence that we take for granted. Many of the negative attitudes that we allow to be built up are rooted in fears that are ignored and denied.

In the Old Testament, mercy was the central theme; the very existence of the covenant between God and Israel was an example of mercy, being granted to Israel freely and without obligation on the part of God (Ps. 79: 8-9; Isa.63:7) In the mission we shall reflect on Israel and the loving mercy of God that reached beyond the broken covenant in its promise and compassion to Israel.

With the new covenant the mercy of God is seen in the death of Jesus Christ; the sacrificial death is in itself a merciful act, demonstrating the divine compassion and making possible the forgiveness of sins – how vital is the sacrament of Penance to renew the heart in mercy when one realizes how lacking one can be in mercy with old habits of anger, revenge and resentment. From this sacrament and the Eucharistic power of healing – in these fundamental graces there follows for all Christians the requirement, who are by definition the recipients of mercy, to exercise mercy and compassion toward all fellow human beings.

Throughout Christian history the awareness of the continuing human need for divine mercy has remained as a central part of Christian worship. The kyrie eleison of the ancient Church has continued to be used in many liturgical forms of worship: "Lord have mercy on us; Christ have mercy on us; Lord have mercy on us." It is from this prayer employing in worship God's mercy, there must follow the definitive practice of mercy in life.

A mission is a call to open the heart to the deeper experience of God's love so one's love grows continually in mercy for all of humanity. It is quite a challenge for all of us. It requires a continual gentle examen daily of an honest inquiry of our thoughts and behaviors with the continuous question "have I been faithful to the Gospel I proclaim? Am I living the Word that I am called to pray daily?"

This Mission will open the graces of the myriad ways the Gospel challenges us to live the mercy of Jesus. What a blessing Pope Francis has bestowed on us in these days of international turmoil and the secularism of our societies to be challenged to grow into deeper holiness.