

Pentecost 11, August 24, 2014



The Mercies-Given Life

Romans 11:33–12:8

Introduction:

Dear friends in Christ,

Grace, mercy and Peace from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

The text of meditation this morning is the New Testament reading of Romans 12, especially verse 1 where the writer tells us: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

In our faith conversations and readings, we hear of God’s mercy, in the singular form, but this text talks about the mercies, plural, as if there is more than one mercy. But is there more than one mercy?

To help us answer the questions lets first define the word mercy. According to the Merriam-Webster mercy is: “a) compassion or forbearance shown especially to an offender or to one subject to one’s power...; a) a blessing that is an act of divine favor or compassion; b) a fortunate circumstance. But also means: “compassionate treatment of those in distress <works of mercy among the poor> is one example.

And if we want to see the meaning behind the original word, in Greek, we will see that it denotes: “Emotions, longings, manifestations of pity (English compassions).” That is according to the Strong’s concordance.

Now, all of those terms meanings and applications really apply to each one of us. As you see God is immeasurable in mercy, in fact that is His nature. And on our part we all need mercy, mercy from God.

I’m reminded of the outcome of Jesus’ encounter with the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1–11) and about to be stoned to death. It is stunning isn’t it? Jesus bids the accusers who have no sin to throw the first stone at her. When he looks up, they have all gone away, all her accusers left. Even the woman’s judges were finally forced to realize that they, too, needed mercy. Jesus absolves the woman with these words: “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.” Jesus had mercy on her. From this point forward, her life would be shaped by this great deed of mercy, and in turn all her deeds would be of mercy as well, towards her neighbors and others.

In our text today, the writer, the Apostle Paul tells us that also we Christians have received mercy from God and thereby become the Givers of Mercy to our neighbors in the Church and in the World.

I. But our lives as Christians are rather characterized by mercy—God’s mercy to us in Christ.

Yes you and I have been inheritors of God’s great mercy. Yes our Creator and Father, out of the depth of his riches (11:33) wisdom and knowledge, had mercy on us in sending us his Son to die for us (5:6–11). He saw our condition, lost in sin, death and enslaved by the devil, and our inability to escape them, and although we deserved death and condemnation for really it was our sin, our rejections of Him, of God, that we

became enslaved by the enemy, sin and death, He didn't want us to be lost forever, so in his heart of mercy a plan was devised to save us.

His Son Jesus had to fulfill that plan by dying on the cross suffering for us the consequence of our sins, suffering for us the condemnations that awaited us. Yes the Father had mercy on us sinners by justifying us in Christ. He declared us righteous by grace alone. He baptized us into Christ's death and resurrection. He sends out the ministry of preaching and the Sacraments (10:14–17).

But that's not all, even when He saved us once and for all, His mercy extends to us, that even when we were already justified and received in the waters of baptism still sin, still follow the desires of the flesh and follow after this world, He still has mercy on each one of His children. Now can that be seen as another kind of mercy?

No, it is just one but seen in many ways, so we can then conclude that God's mercy is plural. After all His purpose is to have mercy on all (11:32), and each time we come to Him with words of confession.

Now because of God's great mercy or mercies which we received and receive and experience every day in our lives, Paul tells we are to become givers of mercy to our neighbors in the Church and in the World.

In other words, although forgiveness and salvation are absolutely and truly personal, forgiveness and salvation extends and reaches to others. There is an outcome to forgiveness and salvation that is not only life eternal in heaven, but joy and peace here, joy and peace that affects others no matter what. Yes but...

II. By nature, we live law-driven lives.

It's not easy! The fact of the matter is that the Law is what drives everything else in life, it does in the workplace, or at school, and community, even in our family dynamics.

We are ever to fill quotas, complete tasks, earn grades, and behave according to the rules established by those institutions. Otherwise, we suffer the consequences of sin, failure, and inability. And although the Law establishes order, I believe it also turns people into selfish entities that will begin to treat God very much the same way, if we don't practice mercy.

Let me explain! In one of my visits to the hospital, a friend of the patient was there already when I got to the person I visited that day. The friends asked how well was the nurse serving the patient, the patient explained that a few things were not happening, but were of not importance. To which the friend replied, that the patient should shout to the nurse, and complain and report her, it was her right to be served and complain if not well served, the nurse should even be fired!

I don't know every single nurse and situation, but I believe we do have good and hardworking nurses—yes there is the odd case—but they are well attentive as well. Just that they are overworked at times. So I told them patient and friend, that instead of reporting the nurse, or make a complaint, maybe they the patient should talk to nurse, if she wasn't attentive, maybe ask why? Who knows maybe she is overworking, or going through difficulties in life, after all, just because she looks good, doesn't mean there are no other things interfering with her service. In other words, just as the patient needed mercy, but for a good nurse-patient relationship the nurse need some mercy as well. As you see the law can turn us into selfish beings.

And the typical example, if something bad is done to you, wouldn't you try to seek justice? That's the result of the law, you brake it there are consequences. But what if you do the same thing to somebody else? Wouldn't you want to ignore it? Or justify it, or even blame others for it? We don't want to suffer the consequence do we? But if it is against us, yes we need the weight of the law to fall upon the trespassers, but not us. As you see we suffer from selfishness.

We do act the same thing with God. We are tempted to try to control our relationship with God by the Law. By nature, we think God works and motivates like the world—saves and incorporates us into the Church through our deeds of the Law. Or that we have the right to receive all kinds of blessings, or that God will welcome us in heaven no matter what, but doesn't work that way.

While God's good Law does show us our sin and provide a guide for Christian living, it has no power to work good in us. We can do no good thing without the mercy of God in Christ.

III. Therefore we live “mercy-given lives” in the Body of Christ: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God . . .” (12:1).

Friends, because of God's mercy we are here today, for God in his mercy has given us new life and as heirs of that new life, the instructions for us is that by those same mercies, we need to renew our minds, and think not in the way of the world, and treat each other not in the way of the world, and respond to each other not in the way of the world, but in the same way God deals with us, and responds to us and treats us. He wants us to be His children and behave as such, different from the world, in thinking, in our speech with others and even about others.

If before we used to swear and speak evil of others, well not anymore! If before we gave harsh responses to questions we are asked, well not any more. If before it was all about the individual, well not anymore, why? Because of God's mercy! Because you have been forgiven, because you are God's child!

But again, it is not that easy, is it? That's why Paul tells us “be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” How do we do that? It is the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word. By studying, by hearing, but meditation in God's word, our mind will be transformed, will be renewed. And by taking hold of God's promises in the Sacraments the Holy Spirit will give us the strength to do so.

And Paul says, it applies, to everyone in the congregation, from leaders to members alike. For God in His mercies has also placed leaders in the congregation, and given gifts, spiritual gifts and vocations to each, so even through them we need to show mercy, for we have been given mercy, and Paul adds with cheerfulness. And doing it so, Paul concludes, is a living sacrifice to God, a sacrifice of worship.

You know, in this congregation we place a high regard to worship, and we ought to, we must, but it is not all, for if we place high regard on our Sunday Worship only, but do not practice mercy, then are we really sure that we have received mercy?

What good is it to us if we only value highly what we do on Sundays, but not our human relationships, and certainly the relationship that Christ brings and establishes in our midst?

But by doing so, by placing a great value in works and attitude of mercy towards others, we do worship with our living bodies for we place them as sacrifice, pleasing to God, and mercy given to others.

Conclusion:

Like the woman caught in adultery, like Peter confessing the Christ in today's Gospel, like David and Paul and the centurion at the cross, we have received salvation through the mercies of God. Our lives are lived in that mercy in the Church, in our families, and among our neighbors in the world, as we carry out our vocations with mercy to all. Amen.