

HOMILIA

To accompany someone in need and be accompanied ourselves as we look to Jesus who is "...the face of the Father's mercy"- this is the call of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. Pope Francis tells us that "Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth." (MV n 1) Thus we begin with that gaze into the face of Jesus and that double call to receive mercy and to share mercy. We walk with someone in deep need of mercy but only after we have first allowed Jesus in His Mercy into our hearts - only after we have encountered Him - in our sinfulness and in His Mercy. Only then, are we, with great humility, able to be his disciples called to announce a jubilee of mercy.

Shortly after his election as pope when Pope Francis was asked how he described himself, he simply said: "I am a sinner." He echoed the first reading from Sirach's call for humility, and in doing so he joined himself to Pope emeritus Benedict's early words as Pope: "I am a humble servant in the vineyard of the Lord." Pope Francis himself walks with Jesus in mercy and asks us to follow.

We gather in conference to take stock and to celebrate this great Jubilee Year. What has been the effect? On one evening in early June at an archdiocesan Priests' Assembly in Louisville, KY, I joined brother priests to reflect on the gift of this Jubilee. Like a spontaneous litany, from throughout the room came instance after instance of mercy ...of the sacrament of reconciliation offered, of penitents coming forward, of home visits to those who have not been to Church for a while, of families reconciled, and marriages made whole. Surely each of you delegates could add greatly to that jubilee litany of mercy!

Pope Francis has spoken of the need to go out to the periphery and not to be turned in on ourselves as a Church. This jubilee gives expression to this call. As a wave at a sporting event makes its way around the stadium, so this world wide wave of mercy is the grace of Jesus touching hearts.

In today's Gospel, Jesus calls us to "banquet wisdom," giving us a very simple parable - one very easy to understand, one that is very common in each of our lives, one that gives insights into this movement of the heart. The central figure in the parable comes to an event and worries about where he will sit. He goes up to a place of prominence and is embarrassed when told to go lower. Pity him and pity those who did not seek the first place but still worried in their hearts about whether they would be noticed and given prominence. The central context of all of this maneuvering and pondering was that it took place at a wedding! At a wedding! This fact is central to understanding this parable. A wedding is about a husband and a wife who wish us to rejoice with them, and here the unfortunate person can think only of his seat! Lord, have mercy. Have mercy when I think not of the couple but only of my place at the table! Have mercy when I want to be the honored one at someone else's wedding!

What will be the effect of this great Jubilee Year of Mercy? Today, we do not look at our Universal Church or at the diocese in which we serve. Rather we look into our hearts. Has the Lord Jesus softened my heart? Do I now go to the wedding and see with love and joy the couple just married, or do I still look for the higher seat?

Of course the wedding feast is symbolic. There are so many ways in which we encounter Jesus in others in this world: in healing the wounds of victims of violence and seeking to call those who do violence to conversion; in taking the first step to bring dignity and respect to every human being, especially those without a voice, and to the innocent, from the moment of conception to natural death; in proper care for our common home on earth. Each day we seek Jesus in the lives of newly married couple and so many other neighbors.

However, and this is the crucial, our eyes will be on the couple only if our eyes are first on the Lord Jesus. In the letter to the Hebrews, we are told that true worship - where we approach Mt. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God, will be the place in which Jesus, our Mediator, and His blood will make our worship pure. That worship, which cleanses our hearts and fills us with joy, will be the joy that turns our eyes outward - to the wedding couple, to every person who desires to receive God's mercy and love.

*Fr. Servais Pinckaers, O.P., in *The Spirituality of Martyrdom ... to the Limits of Love*, identifies the core of the early Church martyrs not in their brave courage and strength but in their humble and faithful following of the Lord Jesus. Speaking of the witness of the deacon St. Stephen, he says, "...deacon Stephen is not called martus because he died for Jesus, but rather that he dies because of his witness to Christ in his evangelical activity." So we draw our inspiration from the early saints. To mention another saint, we are like Mary of Magdala, whom the church calendar now honors as the woman who first experienced the Risen Lord in His mercy. It was this encounter that moved her heart to announce the joy of His rising to others. Like her, we share what we have first received.*

May Jesus, our Merciful Savior, bless the Americas - bless the Church who announces the good news, bless us who receive and share the mercy of God as we look to Jesus who is "...the face of the Father's mercy."

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