

Living the Spirit
Day of Mercy

Pope John Paul II decided to make the Sunday Octave of Easter a Day of Divine Mercy. He did this with his knowledge of the revelations attributed to St. Faustina. The attribution to God of His divine Mercy, however, has been a part of Revelation for many centuries. In the Old Testament we find Israel attributing to God the compassion and fidelity of God towards His people as the substance of His mercy. This attribute encompasses also the idea of piety, instinctive goodness, pardon and forgiveness.

Modern usage, determined by the Latin used in the Church, has identified mercy with compassion and forgiveness. It is this aspect of God's many attributes that we think of Today when we celebrate God's Mercy.

Whenever we think of our unhappy sinfulness we come to think of our God as a God of Mercy. His love reaches out to bring us to forgiveness and activates our desire to know God as a loving and merciful Savior. Certainly Jesus in His incarnation is seen as our Savior. His entire life inspires us to see Him as our redeemer. His miracles were works of mercy. His teachings were a call for his followers to know His mercy for the sinner. The Church recognizing Jesus as Lord in its liturgy prays to Him: Kyrie eleison, Lord have mercy. This cry is the cry of the poor, of the sinner, and yes, of the saint. Even the saints were aware of how much they were in need of God's mercy which comes from His love.

On this day of mercy we should take up the work of being merciful in our own life. This is a duty we have, as St. Luke reminds us in his gospel 6,36. Being merciful like our Father is merciful is an essential condition for entering the kingdom of heaven. Our mercy makes us aware of our neighbors who need our pity, our tenderness, forgiveness, compassion – all of which are mirror images of the Divine attribute we celebrate as Divine Mercy.

If we find ourselves lacking in any of the aspects of mercy, we would do well to read and meditate upon the actions of Jesus as He walked among us. He welcomed sinners. He taught in his parables how mercy came through the goodness of a Samaritan. He died for us praying to the Father to forgive those who do not know what they do. His gospel is an announcement of mercy for sinners, and reveals the love which comes so abundantly from the heart of God.

It is not always easy to imitate the Lord in being merciful to those who injure us in any way. But it is possible to do so, if only we activate our faith, our hope and our love. These virtues have been given us at our baptism. They have undoubtedly grown over the years of our life by the ordinary works of our vocation as followers of the Lord. He is ready to listen to our prayer to be like Him and make our hearts like His own.

Two New Saints

Today our Holy Father, Pope Francis will canonize two Blessed Servants of God as saints. We rejoice that we have lived – many of us – when the Church was governed by John XXIII and John Paul II. Both relied often on the grace of God to bring them to the special work the Lord desired of them and we benefitted from their lives of work.

Pope John XXIII is known for his calling the Church to a general Council. His desire in this Council was to have an updating of the Church's mission to announce the gospel. The Council met and its effect was to make the members of the Church realize the signs of the time and work to bring about a world of holiness in the midst of many failures to achieve for humanity its moral and spiritual needs.

Pope John is remembered for his good humor. He once spoke of his wonder why God did not make him more attractive, knowing that he would become the pope. Those who lead the Church must often recall how he mentioned his evening prayer: "God, it is your Church and the Pope (himself) is going to bed. Take care of it." Long before, he welcomed the Jews in their persecution by saying: "I am your brother Joseph," a reference to Joseph, the Old Testament patriarch. And we think of his very human concern about what he should call Jacqueline Kennedy when she visited him. He thought perhaps it would be well to call her Mrs. Kennedy, but ended up simply saying: "Jacqueline!"

All these human recollections did not hide his inner holiness. Of it we have received a good example of trust in God.

Pope John Paul is so well known for so many things that I do not feel the need to write of his accomplishments. We may recall with the secular world his aid in helping bring about the end of communism as a vital force in much of Europe. We think of his many writings that speak so attractively of the teachings of the Church in our time.

On a personal note it was my good fortune to shake his hand on three occasions. He blessed me and reminded me to preach Christ. My thoughts have often gone to what he meant. Not just by words, but by doing what I was called to do in my ministry. This time of rejoicing in his canonization will bring me added memories. And so many will have similar happy thoughts.

The People of God at his death began a universal call: Santo subito; A Saint right away! In its wisdom the Church waited for miracles of proof. The Lord listened to these saints and their intercession for those in great need. No doubt many will still seek their aid. Certainly this will be a constant help for those who lead the Church. Let us especially pray that these two Saints will help Pope Francis and our Bishop John.

God love you always!

Monsignor Morrison