

During the 40 days of Lent, we can use the disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving – to move beyond our wants to our needs. We can discern what is important and what is not. We can reprioritize our lives – thinking less of ourselves and more of others --- and we can become merciful. . .

I think this Lent lends itself quite well to those endeavors – and perhaps Pope Francis actually had such things in his mind and heart when he proclaimed this year the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Because as I looked at the readings for Lent several months ago – specifically at the Gospel readings we have – this is how I saw it playing out. . .

The first three Sundays of Lent – give us certain tools – or things that need to be present in our lives in order for us to be merciful people: those who are able to put ourselves in another person’s shoes – and feel their pain – just as Christ felt our pain during his life on earth.

And then the last two Sundays of Lent – yes, Lent does just last for five weeks, although for most of us it seems much longer --- but on those last two Sundays of Lent --- we see mercy in action – as we hear the story of the Prodigal Son, and Jesus’ encounter with the woman caught in adultery.

So what tool were we given last week --- what did we learn last week which needs to be present in our lives in order for us to be merciful people?

We have to have the right priorities in our lives. The values of the kingdom of God: love, mercy, forgiveness, peace and justice – must be essential for us to live our lives well as Christians --- we can’t see those things as expendable. . . They can’t be things that we do only when we think we have the time, or only when we have the desire – they must become as automatic to us as breathing. . .

To be merciful – we have to have the right priorities in our lives.

That is our minds and our hearts immediately need to hone in on questions like: what is the most loving thing for me to do at this time, in this situation, with this person. . .

What must I do, here and now, to make sure the most just thing is done?

Not only should we be asking who it is in our lives we need to forgive – but be the first one to step out with the offer of forgiveness.

And because we have felt hurt, wronged, mistreated, ignored, belittled, forgotten, left-out, betrayed, or disappointed at some point in our lives – and most likely, many times in our lives ---- Then we want to help someone else have less of that pain in their lives --- and the effect of this action is called, mercy.

So step one on the road to be merciful – is having the right priorities in our lives.

Step two is found deep within today’s story of the transfiguration --- which by the way, is a story we hear every year on the second Sunday of Lent --- we always travel from the desert – to the mountaintop –which in the Scriptures -- is a place of encounter with God, a place where transformation is possible.

After Peter acknowledges the fact that it is good for the three disciples to be there with Jesus – a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and from the cloud a voice proclaimed: “this is my chosen Son; listen to him.”

So if we want to be merciful people – we have to listen to Jesus. . . and what was the inaugural address, the state of the union, the mission statement we heard Jesus tell us a couple of weeks ago?

“The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”

IF we listen to Jesus – then we put our faith into action. . . We bring glad tidings to the poor by our almsgiving – our acts of charity. Done not because we have a few extra dollars in our pockets – but

because it is the right thing to do – because we have realized just how blest we are compared to so many others in the world --- and almsgiving, our acts of charity is our outlet for our gratitude.

IF we listen to Jesus -- we proclaim liberty to captives --- by freeing those we keep imprisoned by our prejudices, our quick judgements, our narrow view of things which keeps us too wrapped up in our own selves.

IF we listen to Jesus -- we let the blind see – by allowing the light of Christ to shine through us by our words of acceptance and encouragement.

We proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord by performing the corporal – the bodily – works of mercy:

- feeding the hungry. –giving drink to the thirsty.
- clothing the naked. – sheltering the homeless.
- visiting the sick and the imprisoned.
- burying the dead.

Pope Francis hopes that during this year of mercy – “we will be renewed by God’s mercy --- be loved by Christ – so that we can enable the power of God’s love to transform our lives – and then we can become agents of God’s mercy – channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation, and make justice and peace flourish.” [Easter *Urbi et Orbi* message on March 31, 2013]

To do this well, we must listen to Jesus – and have the right priorities in our lives.