Homily

2EasterC (Divine Mercy)

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St Bernard Church

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Some of us have to learn about mercy the hard way.

For example, when my son Danny was about ten, he was playing with a tennis ball in the front yard of our house. At some point, he either hit or threw the tennis ball towards the house, shattering the glass in our dining room window.

This upset me very much. I expressed to my son in loud, very clear terms, how displeased I was. I was not interested in any attempts on his part to explain the details of what I’m sure he thought was a complete accident.

About 15 minutes after this incident, Danny, some of our other children and I were in the family room. I was lying on the floor, tossing a basketball up in the air and catching it when it came down. I had done this successfully several times when on my next attempt the basketball somehow hit the arm of a chair at an angle that made the ball bounce away from me and through one of our family room windows.

This made Danny very happy. And it gave me a lesson in mercy.

Since 2000, the Sunday after Easter has been named Divine Mercy Sunday.

I think mercy is a tough subject for modern Americans like us, but I’m going to try to make some helpful comments about God’s mercy.

It was Pope Saint John Paul II who designated the Sunday after Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday. In doing so, he said that divine mercy was, and I’m quoting him:

“that love which is benevolent, which is compassionate, which raises man above his weakness to the infinite heights of the holiness of God.”

St. Paul speaks of divine mercy in Ephesians 2:4-5, when he writes:

“God is rich in mercy; because of his great love for us, he brought us to life with Christ when we were dead in sin.”

These days, it’s common for a lot of Christians and even non-Christians to think that the vast majority of us will go to heaven when we die. There’s this basic sense that God loves everybody, He accepts us as we are, understands our weakness and lets us in the door to heaven unless we have done something very, very evil, like be a mass murderer.

There’s truth in that, but there’s more to the story.

First of all, while it’s not popular to think about this or talk about it, there really is such a thing as sin. I can say for sure that I and a whole lot of other people have committed grave sins that, without repentance and a good confession, would have jeopardized our salvation.

I think there’s a tendency to think that declaring something a sin is a democratic process, that it doesn’t really matter what God or Jesus or the Church has said, especially if we have lots of company in ignoring what’s on the books. We act like there’s safety in numbers.

Well, you might remember that passage in the Bible about the narrow gate. It’s in Matthew, Chapter 7, verses 13 and 14. Here’s what it says:

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and how constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few.”

There is not a single person in this church today who is living a life that deserves, as a matter of justice, to be allowed to enter into the bliss of heaven for the rest of eternity.

What opens that door is the mercy of God, made available to us by the suffering and death of Jesus, His Son.

So the whole idea of Divine Mercy Sunday is for each one of us to be filled with gratitude at what Jesus has done for us, to confidently entrust ourselves to the mercy of God, and to strive to be obedient and faithful to the commandments of God and His Church.

When we trust Jesus to have control of our lives, to guide us and help us be obedient, He responds by pouring out His graces to us. St. Faustina, a Polish nun whose private revelations inspired the Divine Mercy devotion, quoted Jesus as telling her:

“My great delight is to unite Myself with souls…When I come to a heart in Holy Communion, My hands are full of all kinds of graces which I want to give to the soul. But souls often do not even pay attention to Me; they leave Me to Myself and busy themselves with other things. Oh, how sad I am that souls do not recognize Love! They treat me as a dead object.”

In another conversation, Jesus told Faustina:

“I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of my tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fount of my mercy…On that day are open all the divine floodgates through which graces flow.”

Trust is the key to the graces Jesus is talking about. He said to Faustina:

“The graces of My Mercy are drawn by means of one vessel only, and that is – trust. The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive.”

The Divine Mercy image depicts Jesus with rays of light representing blood and water pouring out from His heart. The inscription on the image reads: “Jesus, I trust in You.”

Here are a couple of things I do that help me focus on the mercy of Jesus.

Before I receive Holy Communion, I recite the Jesus Prayer, which goes like this:

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” I normally repeat this 3 times.

Then, when I do receive Communion, I think about the passage in today’s Gospel about Thomas, and when the priest places the Body of Christ in my hand, I pray, “Lord, may I touch the wounds in your hands, your feet and your side, and believe.”

Jesus wants so badly for us to accept His forgiveness and the fullness of His graces, to actually participate in His divine life. Today, on this Feast of Divine Mercy, He promises us, through the Church, that we can receive special graces, including a complete pardon for our sins, by being in the state of grace (assured through a timely sacramental Confession), receiving Communion worthily at Mass today and reciting the Divine Mercy prayers sometime today.

I will close with the prayer that ends the Divine Mercy Chaplet:

Eternal God, in whom mercy is endless, and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us, and increase your mercy in us, that in difficult moments, we might not despair, nor become despondent, but with great confidence, submit ourselves to your holy will, which is Love and Mercy itself. Amen.