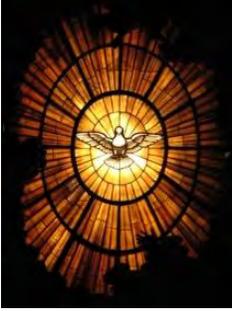


THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY



Pope Francis has called for an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy to be celebrated by the Church beginning December 8. He has “proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy as a special time for the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective” because “at times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives” (Misericordiae Vultus, #3).

“We want to live this Jubilee Year in light of the Lord’s words: Merciful like the Father. The Evangelist reminds us of the teaching of Jesus who says, ‘Be merciful just as your Father is merciful’ (Lk 6:36)” (MV, #13).

Pope Francis asks us to seek to adopt God’s mercy as our lifestyle.

We have an idea what this would like from St. Paul’s instruction to the Colossians: “Heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. ... Put on love ... let the peace of Christ control your hearts ... be thankful.”

Simple, right? Sirach at least provides us with a few specific instructions, “Whoever honors his father atones for sins. ... He stores up riches who reveres his mother.”

That provides some help, but let’s look at a real-life example from today’s Gospel: After losing Jesus for three days, Joseph and Mary found him in the temple and his mother said to him, “‘Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.’ And he said to them, ‘Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’

But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.”

Yes, we are talking about two saints and the Son of God, but we can learn three lessons from this story.

First, even after suffering for days with great anxiety – the heart-wrenching agony of losing a child – Mary’s reproach was firm yet removed from anger.

Second, instead of adopting an attitude and teetering towards the rebellious teenager stage, Jesus was obedient to his parents, even after returning home.

Third, instead of holding onto resentment and watching Jesus with a suspicious eye, Mary “kept all these things in her heart.”

From this episode in a real family’s life, we observe a practical application of Paul’s teaching: *compassion* (which moves beyond empathy into a complete, maternal living for another) as Mary searched in great worry for her son; Mary’s *gentle* albeit firm reunification with her son, Jesus’s *humble*, obedient response, and an *absence of grievance* lingering in Mary’s heart as her worries, instead of marinating in anger, became questions to ponder.

Embracing this Jubilee Year of Mercy and allowing it to transform the way we live our lives will not be easy. Just as we use the 40 days of Lent to focus on conversion before celebrating Easter, we have a year to focus on changing our hearts to mercy. If we slip, we surely ask for forgiveness from a merciful Father.

(Sunday Readings for December 27, 2015)



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