

## **“Asking God for Mercy, in Order to Overcome the Power of Evil in the World”**

### **Homily**

### **40 Days for Life Mass**

**March 23, 2019**

In the Divine Office – the Liturgy of the Hours that priests and consecrated religious are obliged to pray at different hours of the day throughout the day – we read today from Psalm 106 in the Office of Readings (the early morning hour) about the Israelites making covenants with the pagan nations and going over to worshiping their idols. It says, "They worshiped the idols of the nations, and these became a snare to entrap them. They even offered their own sons and their daughters in sacrifice to demons. They shed the blood of the innocent, the blood of their sons and daughters whom they offered to the idols of Canaan. The land was polluted with blood. So, they defiled themselves by their deeds and broke their marriage bond with the Lord."

Things haven't changed much, have they? Don't we see this happening in our own time? The innocent being offered up in sacrifice, but not to pagan gods, the idols of Canaan, but to the idols of selfishness, greed, lust; to the idol of reducing others to an object in order to be a means to one's own end. They broke their marriage bond with the Lord – that is, the Covenant. The Covenant the Lord made with them was a marriage covenant. They broke it by sacrificing to idols. This is now happening in our world today. We sacrifice the most vulnerable life – in the womb – and so we end up destroying marriage. That is the whole point of marriage, to welcome life into the world, to care and nourish and love that life so that the child might be able to know and be loved by the child's mother and father – the mother and father being connected to each other and together to the children they bring into the world. Marriage thus makes no more sense if the little ones are sacrificed to demons.

And so it went ill for Israel, as the Psalm continues: "His anger blazed against his people. He was filled with horror at his chosen ones. So he gave them into the hand of the nations, and their foes became their rulers. Their enemies became their oppressors. They were subdued beneath their hand." We see so much devastation in our society, because of our society's crimes of sacrificing our children to demons. The breakdown of families, abuse in families, rampant senseless violence, people caught in poverty, youth violence, crime. These societal ills and others are rampant today. We are reaping the bitter fruits of our sacrificing our little ones to demons.

People know how evil this is. They instinctively sense it. Just the other night I had an interaction with a group of young people in the Diocese of Fresno, speaking to them and answering their questions. They had prepared questions ahead of time. One of the questions was, "Can the sin of abortion be forgiven?" This is coming from a high school student. They know how evil it is. Of course, every sin can be forgiven, but they realize it's so bad that they even wonder if it can be forgiven. Yet, the Lord is kind and merciful, as we prayed in the Responsorial Psalm for Mass today, and so Psalm 106 continues: "For their sake he remembered his covenant. In the greatness of his love, he relented and he let them be treated with mercy by all who held them captive."

The Lord is merciful, but we need to turn to Him for mercy. Is not that the lesson of this most beloved parable we heard in our gospel today, the parable of the Prodigal Son, often called the

“gospel within a gospel”? It's a profound image of God's mercy. It is the gospel prescribed for this day, Saturday of the second week of Lent. But for the Sunday readings on the three-year cycle we are in the C cycle when the gospel comes the Gospel of Luke. So, we're doubly privileged this year in Lent, because a week from tomorrow, the Fourth Sunday of Lent, we will hear this same gospel again – a very cherished, beloved gospel that speaks of the depths of God's love and mercy for us.

Even this son – who clearly was very foolish, very selfish, thinking only of himself – he, too, reduced others being a means to his own end: even his own father! Asking for a share of the inheritance before his father died? That was tantamount to telling his father, "You are dead to me." So self-centered was he that he reduced even his own father to a means to his own selfish desires; and yet, when he is in the midst of his own misery, what happens? The reading says that he comes to his senses. He finally wakes up to the truth of his father's love. How often it happens that we have to be in the depths of misery to come to our senses and realize the truth of God's love. And so he returns, and is welcomed and forgiven – that prodigal son who is so representative of us so often. But this is a parable that has different levels of interpretation.

There are those who have the insight that the prodigal son can also represent the Son of God, our Lord. This might seem shocking, and heretical, because he (the prodigal son) immerses himself in a life of sin. But what does St. Paul tell us? That Christ became sin for us. He took all of our sins upon himself. The son leaves the father's home to go and mingle with those who are far away from God: sinners, pagans, those who didn't know God and were not living in any way resembling someone who would know God.

And so our Lord leaves his Father's home, he leaves heaven, to mingle with us sinners here on this earth, when he takes our sins upon himself, and he dies. What does the son say in the parable? "I shall get up"; I will arise, "and return to my father." Jesus arose in his Resurrection, and returned to his Father in the glory of the Ascension. He came to rescue us from our misery and sin – another way this parable betrays for us the depths of God's love and mercy for us, that He would send his own Son, innocent, to become sin for us, so that our sins in his body might be nailed to the cross and killed, and so that we might live with him forever.

Let us always be coming to our senses. Let us always be grateful for and witnesses to God's love and mercy. Let us persevere in our prayer and our witness, that our society might come to its senses, that it might renounce the worship of pagan gods, of these false idols, of selfishness and of self-indulgence that cause so many ills; come to our senses to realize that God is ready to forgive us. May God grant us this prayer.