

September 13, 2020 Mercy, Mercy Me Homily: Hans Frank, a convicted war criminal was arguably one of the most sinister and notorious figures of the last century. A lawyer by profession, he served as the first administrator of Nazi occupied Poland during the Second World War. He was utterly ruthless and merciless. By his own admission, he was complicit in the murder of close to four million men, women and children. After the war he and many others were put on trial for crimes against humanity. Tellingly, he was one of only two defendants who showed any remorse for their evil actions. He publicly confessed during the public trial at Nuremberg that the German people had turned away from God. He declared, "I beg of our people not to continue in this direction, be it even a single step; because Hitler's road was the way without God, the way of turning from Christ and, in the last analysis, the way of political foolishness, the way of disaster and the way of death."

During the trial the war criminal converted to the Catholic faith. In the face of God's impending judgment, he confessed his sins to a Franciscan priest. Was he sincere, truly repentant for his grave sins? Only Heaven knows! But his last words before his execution are worthy of note. He said, "I ask God to accept me with mercy."

In today's parable of the unforgiving servant, a question of fundamental importance arises; must I always forgive? Recall Peter's question; "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him, as many as seven times?" (Mt. 18: 21) Jesus insists that there can be no limits placed on our mercy toward others. "I say to you not seven times, but seventy-seven times." (Mt. 18:22) In the story, the king's unexpected mercy stands in sharp contrast to the harshness of the unforgiving servant. Bear in mind that the Hebrew word for "mercy" is "Chesed", which means a kindness we don't earn or even deserve.

Jesus calls us to a high standard of mercy. One of the overriding themes in the Gospel of Matthew is God's mercy in Christ. Jesus is the human face of Divine Mercy. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your transgressions".

In the Lord's Prayer, we pray the words, "Forgive us our trespasses *as we forgive those who trespass against us*".

In one of the beatitudes, Jesus pledges that those who show mercy will obtain mercy.

What must be our personal response to the mercy of God? The answer is to show mercy to others. We must be generous in forgiving others, compassionate and kind, and return good for evil.

What further lessons can we derive from today's gospel?

First, to quote a Trappist monk and scholar: "The only reason why I can forgive, have mercy, be compassionate, perform an act of kindness is that God has done these things to me first. In the very act of having mercy on me, he has communicated to me the ability to do likewise. We cannot expect forgiveness on a grand scale between people and races if we fail to practice it on as small scale in our lives";

Second, showing mercy to others can be an effective witness to our Christian faith. We may, through our good example, have a hand in converting the sinner; and

Third, the late civil rights leader Martin Luther King, points out that forgiveness does not mean ignoring what has been done or putting a false label on an evil act. It means rather that the evil act can no longer remain a barrier to a relationship. A lack of mercy characterizes our modern age. There is too much anger, rage and resentment. Instead of offering the gift of a forgiving heart, we are more likely to say, "I want nothing to do with you. Go to hell." That's a barrier tough to penetrate.

Only recently our parish suffered the loss of a holy priest. Having lived with him for over nineteen years, I can truthfully say he never spoke negatively of others. He was the paragon of human mercy and gentleness and a friend to all those who suffered on account of their past sins. His name is Father James J. Vaughan, and I truly believe his name is now enrolled in the Book of Life.

Amen!