

2021 Year of the Eucharist and St. Joseph
Homily Aid: Fourth Sunday in Lent – March 14, 2021
The Penitential Act and Gloria

- “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.” (John 3:16).
 - This scripture passage is familiar to almost every Christian... But do we realize that it speaks about God loving us so much that he sent his Son to *save* us so that we might have eternal life. This implies that we are **in need of being saved** – needing to be **saved from sin by this gift of God which is his merciful love**.
- In the Mass, after recognizing in the Sign of the Cross the two great mysteries of our faith – the Trinity and the Cross – we take time to prepare ourselves through the **Penitential Act** to enter into the sacred liturgy and encounter Christ.
 - In this action we call to mind our sins which separate us from God. We recognize our need for God’s help, our need to be saved, and so we ask his mercy upon us: **“Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.”**
 - We ask God to help us that by acknowledging our sins we may prepare ourselves to listen to his Word and share in the Body and Blood of Christ
- What is MERCY? It is who God is! It is God’s saving help, which we see Jesus embody throughout the Gospels:
 - This request for mercy is directly made to Jesus by numerous individuals seeking healing for themselves or others (e.g., Mt 9:27-30; 15:22; 17:15; Mk 10:46-48; Lk 17:13).
 - Recall also the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector (Lk 18:9-14). The Pharisee was self-righteous, praying to God about how good he was, while the tax collector could not lift his eyes to heaven, but instead humbly admitted his sinfulness, beating his chest and begging, **“God, be merciful to me a sinner!”** Jesus said that this tax collector who humbled himself – realizing his sin and need for mercy – is the one who went home justified.
- The Confiteor is one of the options for the Penitential Act, in which we strike our breast three times. We sit in the midst of the Church in the presence of God and confess that we are sinners in our thoughts, actions, and lack of action; we ask for the intercession of Mary, the angels and saints, and of our brothers and sisters as we strike our breast as a sign of penance.
 - Reflecting on this ritual act, Romano Guardini states that with our fist we “beat against the gates of our inner world in order to shatter them.” That we – with God’s grace – can tear down the walls of our sinfulness to experience the saving and merciful power of our God.
- Through the Penitential Act, we acknowledge our sins and ask God to open our hearts to receive His saving help – His mercy, which He always desires to give us. We acknowledge that we are sinners who are loved and forgiven.
- Immediately following this, **we join the angels and saints in heaven** and sing **the Gloria** – the same hymn sung by the angels to the shepherds heralding the birth of Jesus (Christmas). The incarnation is God’s response to our sinfulness!
 - This hymn was originally sung as part of the Christmas liturgy, but was later added to all solemnities and feasts because of the joy expressed in the coming of Christ into the world for our salvation.
- During Lent and Advent, we do not sing the Gloria due to the penitential nature of the seasons and the emphasis on expectancy – we look forward to the birth of Christ and his Second Coming during Advent, and we look forward to the Resurrection in the Lenten season.
- In this hymn we acknowledge in song, **who Jesus is**: the Lamb of God, Only Begotten Son, the Holy One, sitting at the right hand of the Father.
 - We acknowledge what he has accomplished for us: he takes away the sins of the world, he offers us mercy, he hears our prayers as our mediator with the Father
 - Most importantly, **with this great hymn, we worship God and acknowledge his divinity**: we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you
- In these seemingly routine moments of the Mass that we can become all too familiar with, the Lord invites us to bring our minds and hearts into the deep mystery of our faith – that God so loves us that he sent his Son so that we may not perish from the sin, but have eternal life with Him. Jesus has come not to condemn the world, but to save the world (see Gospel reading). We give God praise and thanksgiving for his merciful love!
- We can also do our best to tie this to our Lenten Season. It is very appropriate.