

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time Homily Thom Trunzo

Today is the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time. We refer to this season as “ordinary time” not because the scriptures are “ordinary,” but rather because we read the Gospel in “order”. This year we are focusing on the Gospel of Matthew, and we hear the very familiar story of the “Loaves and Fishes.” Matthew’s writings most often depicts the very human side of Jesus, and we see it again today; a very tired and grief-stricken man after learning about the beheading of his cousin, John the Baptist, who retreated to be in quiet and yet found himself swarmed by a crowd of people wanting to hear him speak. Even in his state of exhaustion, he had compassion on and extended mercy to the followers.

Once again, the Psalm of the day picks up on this theme of mercy and we hear the many facets and forms that mercy takes. While our first thought correlates mercy with forgiveness, and it surely is one of its hallmarks, mercy takes on many other faces. It may be helpful if we take a few minutes to explore these other faces of mercy to not only see how God rains mercy on us, but how we are to extend mercy to others. Let’s focus on Psalm 145.

The Lord is Gracious – Gracious is defined as *polite or courteous*. Perhaps we do not think of how being polite or courteous is a way of extending mercy. Yet these qualities give dignity, show respect and allow the person with whom we interact to feel and experience self-worth and a sense of value.

Slow to Anger – How do our actions measure-up against what we want and expect from God? We hope that God will be slow to become angry when we sin, but how do we react when someone crosses us? Do our tempers flare and is our anger easily ignited? Are we intent on imposing our feelings of anger onto those who offend us, or are we seeking a sense of calm and love instead? Anger is a valid, God-given emotion, but it is what we do with anger that can either lead to healing or to destruction.

Rich in Kindness - compassion – gentleness – thoughtfulness – helpfulness -- These are some of the words that define “kindness.” Do we walk through our lives trying to be thoughtful of the needs or feelings of others, or are we too often self-absorbed with our own situations that we neglect to show sympathy or feel compassion towards others? Yet kindness is not simply a casual action, it is a divine trait; a way of allowing the invisible God to become visible to someone else through gentleness and a willingness to serve.

You open your hand and satisfy – Indira Gandhi once said, “*You cannot shake a hand with a clenched fist*”. This echoes today’s psalm that speaks of opening a hand to both give and receive. As a clenched fist depicts anger, violence or resistance, our psalmist speaks of the opposite; that is, an open hand ready to share and give unto another that which he or she needs to be satisfied. That can take the shape of physical needs such as food, money or shelter, or in other intangible ways such as understanding, time, a shoulder to cry on, etc.

Just in your ways and holy in your works – Too often I see on the news or hear people say that they are seeking “justice.” But in so many cases, they really mean revenge, retaliation or punishment. While these are seemingly justifiable reactions, they are not the divine qualities that we hope for from our God. In today’s psalm, we are greatly challenged to act justly, *fairly, honorable, equitably, morally*, and to be HOLY in what we do. Pope Paul VI said, “*If you want peace, work for justice.*” Working for justice means working towards ensuring that every person has their basic needs met, that resources are shared, that we act by seeing that each person and even our environment is treated with respect and given the honor that God intended.

The Lord is near to all who call upon him – Since God is pure spirit, it is our call to be the face of God in a physical and tangible way in this world. To be the hands of Jesus, serving and touching the hearts of others – to continue the works of Jesus in healing, reconciling and serving. This is how we live out our baptismal call. But in order to do this, we cannot remain aloof or disconnected or so self-absorbed that we cannot see nor connect to the needs of others. We must have our eyes open to see and our beings ready to draw near so that we can hear those who are calling out for help. Serving is personal and touching the body, mind and soul of another requires us to be accessible and a willingness to be near in order to engage.

As we move from the comfort of our Sunday readings, church gatherings and liturgies, we hopefully will take with us these qualities of MERCY so that we can become the people who the psalmist is asking us to be. It is the MERCY not only spoken in the psalm, but shown to us in the Gospel story. It is the MERCY Jesus gave to the people, in the context of his own grief and exhaustion, he allowed himself draw near the needs of the people; he saw them through his eyes of compassion, and extended Godly justice to them by giving to each what he or she needed in that moment.

May our day and weeks ahead bring us opportunities to be that face and voice of MERCY in the moments of need that we will encounter.