



LENT 2020: Mercy

By The Rt. Rev. Daniel G. P. Gutiérrez

“The Lord’s mercy endures forever.” Psalm 136

Go and learn what this means, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.’ Matthew 9:13

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful ...” Luke 6:36

Mercy is powerful, transformative, hopeful, life-giving, and foundational to both the Old and New Testaments. Mercy is knowing that we are forgiven. Mercy speaks of God’s inexhaustible love for each one of us. Mercy is demonstrated daily through our acts of compassion, forgiveness, gratitude, and love. Mercy that Jesus Christ is risen and present.

The world is being defined by retribution, division, lack of accountability, and a “winner takes all” attitude. Despite its loving power, mercy is often forgotten or ignored. We cannot be held hostage by the ways of the world. We must demonstrate in each thought, word, and action that we are liberated by the mercy and love of God.

During this holy season of Lent, I ask the faithful of our diocese to join me in a prayerful time of mercy. A time where we open ourselves to the knowledge of God’s mercy and then demonstrate that mercy in how we treat others.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus shows mercy in embracing the outcast, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, raising the dead, forgiving the sinner, and welcoming the stranger. The root of the word “mercy” derives from *miseri cordis*, which means opening one’s heart to wretchedness. Jesus enters into our lives and reflects the loving face of God to the world. The profound love of God for each of us means that Jesus always responds to our pain and suffering.

Mercy precedes all the great miracles. I often imagine how those who were hurting, lost, and lonely humbly approached Jesus. The moment Jesus looked into their eyes and every fiber of their being was filled with God’s mercy. How their hearts were filled with God’s love and the awakening of the goodness within. It has been said by a great theologian, “God forgives not with a decree but with a caress. Jesus goes beyond the law and forgives by caressing the wounds of our sins.”

As followers of Jesus, we are called to share that same mercy we are given with everyone we meet.

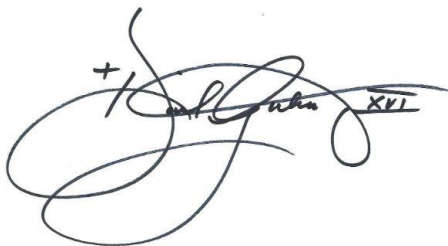
Our lives thus become the holy interplay of opening ourselves to the presence of God through prayer, knowing Jesus because of our yearning for oneness with God. Understanding we need God’s mercy living in gratitude that we are blessed with that mercy. Thus, we live as transformed, awakened, and compassionate followers of Christ.

Thus, I invite you to participate in the following Lenten practice centering on mercy:

1. Think of the names of a minimum of five people, writing them on a piece of paper. It could be more than five but start with five. You will pray for these people during Lent.
2. Now the hard part. Of the five that you have chosen to pray for, make sure that two of them are people you are in conflict with, separated from, have difficulty forgiving or truly dislike. In your prayers, ask that God blesses them throughout the day, pray for only good to occur in their lives, pray for love and hope.
3. Pray for these people first thing in the morning, throughout the day, and make this the last thing you do at night. Pray for them holding that piece of paper in your hands during the entirety of Lent.
4. On Good Friday or during the Great Vigil, I ask that you take the piece of paper and reverently dispose of it, perhaps you pin it to the cross or burn it in the paschal fire.
5. I ask that you invite one of those people that you have prayed for to attend a Holy Week service with you.
6. On Easter Sunday, reflect on the Lenten Season of praying. Offer the names of those you have held in prayer over this Lenten season in joyful gratitude as you receive the Holy Eucharist.

Finally, I always like to share a book or a movie. I recently viewed "The Last Days in the Desert," a film which captures the final days of Jesus' time in the wilderness. Once you move beyond some actors who are not representative of the people and culture of the Holy Land, it might cause you, as it did me, to reflect deeper on relationships and Jesus' time in the desert.

God bless each of you, and I hold you in my heart as we walk together during Lent. May the blessing of God Almighty be with you and those you love this day and forever more.



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