

HOMILY ON THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER (DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY)

'What have you,' St. Paul asked, 'that is not given to you, and if they were given, why do you boast as they were not?' (1 Cor. 4:7). Everything we have, both in the order of nature and of grace, are gratuitous gifts from God so that we should have no reason whatsoever to boast. If you are better than the other person in a certain area, it is because you are specially endowed in that area for the special and specific purpose God wants to achieve through you. It is not so much of your personal efforts but more by the special grace of God; not because of family background, your social statutes, your race, not even because of your holiness of life; but even if they were as a result of any or all of these, the initial motivation, the strength of the will, intelligence, your very life and the health of mind and body were all given to you by God. What makes to be puffed off and to boast as if they were achieved on your own strength?

Mercy is opposed to justice, for while justice has to do with the right that one deserve as one's due, mercy is what one never deserved and sometimes will never deserve yet it is given to him/her as a privilege. With this succinct distinction, I would make bold to say that neither life, the gift of intelligence, health of mind and body etc, were given to us because we deserved them rather they were given out of God's mercy.

Divine Mercy Sunday is an Observance in the Roman Catholic Church in which we are encouraged to offer forgiveness and reconciliation to all. It is based on the visions recorded from St. Faustian Kowalski. In 2000, it was decreed a solemnity, by the then supreme pontiff, Pope John Paul II.

St. Faustian had visions much of her life. One that was the most profound was of Jesus, with one hand raised in blessing and with two fingers of his other hand resting on his heart. She said that Jesus asked her to have the image painted, and to include a prayer that said, "Jesus, I trust in you." This is the prayer that Catholics recite on Divine Mercy Sunday.

Divine Mercy is therefore the mercy of God towards mankind which is perfectly demonstrated by Christ's passion and death on the cross at Mt. Calvary. Man never merited such favour from God, it was purely out of His boundless mercy on mankind. On the cross shortly before He expired, Christ taught us a perfect lesson which every Christian ought to follow and which actually is the yardstick for measuring the holiness for which every follower of Christ should be known – forgiveness. Christ on the cross, amidst the excruciating pain, forgave His murderers, 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do.' Apart from forgiving His murderers on the cross, Christ also instituted the sacrament of reconciliation through which He constantly shows mercy to His weak and unfaithful creatures whenever they erred. The two central messages today are: **LEARN TO FORGIVE OTHERS WHEN THEY WRONG YOU, ASK FOR FORGIVENESS FROM OTHERS WHEN YOU WRONG OTHERS.** These two statements are mighty and are capable of setting the kingdom of darkness ablaze.

Unfortunately, the message of hate spreads very fast in our world today, a reason why many remain slaves to their passion. Forgiveness is not possible without love therefore when the gospel of hate rather than love is being preached both in words and deeds, love is sidetracked. Last year in the United States of America alone 65 school shootings were recorded when we have 52 weeks in a year, meaning that more than one school shooting on the average, took place in a week last year. This year we are barely 13 weeks and we have recorded about 28 school shootings which means that more than 2 school shootings on the average takes place every week. In African and Nigeria in particular, we may not be talking of school shooting but the menace of the terrorists groups called Boko Haram and the Fulani Herdsmen have claimed a lots of lives. Innocent people are butchered like cattle, women are raped before their children and husbands, people's ancestral lands are forcefully taken away from them. The list is endless because we cannot talk about the activities of the ISIS who have sent innumerable people to their untimely grave. All these can be explained to lack of love in the society.

Of all the commandments given to us by Christ, forgiveness is the most difficult. It may be the easiest to preach about but it remains the most difficult to exemplify or practicalize, yet it is through it that authentic Christians are distinguished. An authentic Christian is the one who, like his master, would preach eloquently by words and deeds, the message of forgiveness, that is, the person who will readily say 'I am sorry' when he wrongs others and/or 'I forgive you' when others wrong him. There is a lot of divorce in the world today because many people are not ready to forgive and forget from their hearts. Discussing about family, Pope Francis said that there is no perfect family. A family is made up imperfect couples who eventually beget imperfect children; meaning that neither children nor their parents are perfect. The only thing that can keep the family together is their readiness to forgive one another as soon as one feels hurt. I know of no other better or more effective remedy to heal our sick families of these age long maladies than this. Once we start preaching love in words and deeds beginning with our families, in the church, at our working places etc., we shall naturally begin to practice forgiveness and thereby become free. 'God is love says the scriptures, and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him' (1John 4:16).

In the gospel of today taken from the gospel of St. John, Jesus handed over to sacrament of reconciliation to the church and through the church calls to come back to Him that He is every ready to forgive and re-graft us to where we belong. A sick person does not rest until he is healed and anyone who commits sin is spiritually sick and should not rest until he is healed. A sinner is slave and every slave yearns for freedom and would do everything humanly possible to be freed; in the same vein, we are all sinners and consequently slaves of sins therefore, we should do everything humanly possible to secure our freedom. When the Son of Man sets you free you are free indeed (Jn 8:36).

The recognized hour of mercy according to the message of Christ through St. Faustina, is 3 O'clock. That may not necessarily mean that God cannot grant us mercy at any other time, but that is the hour when Christ expired on the cross. We are requested to form the habit of saying the divine mercy prayer at that time and through that means call down God's mercy on our various families, on the church and in the world.