

THE INCARNATION OF MERCY

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

During this highest point of the liturgical year, the greatest feast was celebrated, the Solemnity of the Resurrection of Jesus, and the following days until we celebrate the Octave of the Resurrection to every day is an Easter celebration. Today is Easter Friday and the Octave, now, thanks to John Paul- St. John Paul culminates in another big feast called Mercy Sunday, that is intimately linked with the Resurrection. And when we stare at the Blessed Sacrament and adore the Blessed Sacrament, the Resurrection takes on a special meaning because the Eucharist is the true presence of Jesus resurrected. And when we celebrate the Mass, we commemorate the Resurrection, the representation of Jesus' redemptive sacrifice on the Cross, but the Cross always finishes with the Resurrection. So, it's a celebration of the Resurrection as well. The true presence of Jesus under the appearance of bread and wine is the resurrected Jesus.

Who is Jesus and why this celebration of Mercy Sunday? This devotion to the mercy of Jesus has been always the case, St. Thomas Aquinas said that Our Lord's most salient perfection, his most prominent perfection, his most attractive perfection is mercy. And when St. Luke quotes Jesus as Jesus wraps up his Sermon on the Mount and says, "You must be perfect as my heavenly father is perfect," that's Matthew. But Luke is very much into the mercy of Christ. He's sensitive because originally his Gospel was written for the Gentiles. So, there's a lot of stress on mercy. He's the one who narrates the parable of the prodigal son, and he says, "be compassionate, be merciful as your Heavenly Father is merciful." So, he didn't say be good as your Heavenly Father is good, be meek as your Heavenly Father is meek. He said be merciful. So, this is the salient quality.

And who is Jesus? Jesus is the incarnation of mercy. God in himself is an unadulterated, infinite mercy. What is mercy? Mercy is that specialized form of charity. Charity has many, many strains to it and mercy is a very special aspect of challenge. And, to show mercy implies power. It sounds like I'm backtracking - compassion and mercy are not the same. I don't mean to be pedantic, but compassion is, you got a D on your term paper and I see that you're misty-eyed and I have compassion. I feel bad because you got a D on your term paper. I feel bad because you feel bad and your grade point average may be lowered because you got a D on a term paper. If I have the power of mercy and your professor is my brother and he owes me a number of favors, well, I'm going to say, well, I have a friend by the name of Penelope. She's one of your students and I'd really like you to give her a B. She is a B. I mean, look at it more closely. We're not going to cheat, of course, but look at it a little bit more closely, see if she deserves a B. I don't want you to give her a

B if she doesn't deserve it, but I have a feeling she does and he comes back to me. Yeah, she kind of does. She's got a B. Why? Because I was merciful. Mercy is when you can do something about someone's pain, show mercy.

Mercy is shown when you deserve to be treated with justice. You're fined \$200 for a traffic violation, but because you are so forthright in the court of law, I know that doesn't happen too much, the judge showed mercy. Okay, you're going to pay \$20. I'm going to show you mercy. So, mercy is relieving someone suffering, and we all need mercy. In fact, Christ came, God became man, because the humanity- every individual's in desperate need of mercy. We're all wounded or another more modern popular word, we're all broken. And what is this woundedness? When somebody says broken, we don't have to get into theological analysis of broken, but from the light of faith someone who's broken is deprived of Christ. He's deprived of that grace. He's deprived of that hope. He's deprived of that healing. See, Christ could put us back together and that's why the sick or sort of main characters in the Gospel, there's individual sick people and then the crowds of sick people just inundating the locale where our Lord would establish himself. And those sick people are real, but they're also symbols of the human condition, and we see a lot of severe sicknesses - paralysis is sort of a common condition of the main characters of the Gospel. There's a lot of paralytics - they're being lowered down, they're near pools, they're on stretchers, etc. So, that's a prominent sickness. The worst one is leprosy - flesh decomposes while you're alive. That's no fun.

And I would say, and these lepers in these leper colonies also are symbols, are icons, of our modern culture because leprosy - their spiritual leprosy that corrodes the soul and causes the soul to decompose - these sicknesses have that common property of depriving someone of freedom. What I don't have the freedom to love, what I don't have the freedom to be joyful, what I don't have the freedom to know the meaning of human life. I mean, I'm not free. And when I'm a slave of my passions, when I'm a slave of sinfulness, there seems a pandemic of slavery, whole societies enslaved to hedonism or to a false sense of morality called moral relativism. And Jesus doesn't come in judgment, he comes in mercy. And when he deals with the sick and when he deals with the sinful, different kinds of sicknesses, Jesus never lowers the boom, not that he says that a sin is a virtue or a sickness is a sign of hell, he's come to reveal the mercy of Jesus.

And so, especially in the past few centuries, especially the last century, the Holy Spirit has moved the Church to focus on mercy. I mean, it prefigured by St. Mary Margaret Alacoque who received private revelations of the Sacred Heart, and that initiated devotion to the Sacred Heart. What's that devotional about? Our God is- is a God of Mercy. Our God revels in forgiving us. And we have Sister Faustina who journaled her visions of Our Lord, her locutions called *The Diary*. And John Paul, one of the greatest saints in the history of the Church, one of the greatest popes canonized her and made a feast that we call Mercy Sunday. And why is that? What does the Gospel say on Mercy Sunday? It says the following: "Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord right after the Resurrection."

What does Jesus do? He empowers his priests to forgive sins in his name. He empowers broken people, wounded people, formerly sinful men who now have power to actually act in Christ's place. They don't just

imitate him. They don't just reflect his life. In fact, Jesus comes truly present in the priest, not because he's virtuous but because he's got a power. It's about others, it's not about him. And what does this power do? "Jesus said to them again, 'peace be with you.'" Because joy and peace are intimately linked with this sacrament of reconciliation. "And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of many, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of many, they are retained."

Just by way of illustration, early in my priesthood I had to change my tune a little bit - a whole series of changing of tunes, but I changed my tune. Anyway, just for the record, if you think you're scared going to confession, I was more scared than you were hearing confessions. And I remember when I was my first day on the job, praying hard, I'll start tomorrow. Hopefully no one will come, and if anybody comes I hope it's just men. They stuck me in this church where there's- sort of like, St. Peter's downtown, but it was run by priests of Opus Dei in Madrid and had confessions around the clock, all day. And so, any priest with his holy oil still moist got broken in rather quickly. And, I thought that the reason you confessed your sins is because it's a little part of the penance you have to do, it's no fun to disclose your wrongdoing to somebody else. Even if it's anonymous, you know, that's no fun. And I said, well, that's I guess, that's you know, a little bit of a penalty for having sinned and I realized this is the most merciful way - God can forgive sins anyway he wants, he's not consigned to the sacraments. It's his show, he can do whatever he wants with his show, but I realized that it was an acquired taste. Breaking the ice was mildly traumatic. I've been gone for- I'm on the 10-year plan. What's- when you start going again it's mildly traumatic.

But I realized that saying it to somebody, just saying it, the catharsis involved, the self-disclosure, this was extremely salutary and it was the most gentle and merciful way of forgiving. Predicated on the priest, you know, not snoring or saying you did what! You know, if he's hard of hearing, you know, that kind of stuff, but if you just celebrate the sacrament and the fact that you're encouraged, the fact that you have a clean slate, or the fact that someone told you have outer certainty that you're forgiven and if you are going to get a little bit reprimanded you may get- because some people, they can't believe it. In Holy Week, it's happened and I'm always afraid it's going to backfire, leave the confessional, someone grabs me, I don't believe that I'm actually forgiven for what I did. What kind of certainty do I have? I said, well this God loves you infinitely, that's the certainty you have. And the guy started to cry right out there. I said, man, there goes my business, you know, it's going to be my neck because he started to cry.

Yes, and we all know it and this unburdening, and this- the grace of just saying it is such a renewal and that's why, when it's offered and when it's cultivated, you're there, there's long lines. I'm not- it's my job. I've got to do something. But a buddy of mine who is going to hear confessions with me, he said well, let's have a meeting, a little bit of a late lunch. And I go, okay, after I'll be at St. Mary of the Angels hearing confessions on Mercy Sunday. And he said, well, it's gonna be a real late lunch. I just realized it's Mercy Sunday. So, we're going to both be there from 10:30 to 2, and I go okay, well, just make sure there's smelling salts in there, not for the penitent but for us guys. Well, because people know - they didn't read a theology book.

Oh, I got to read a theology book because you know, whose sins you forgive are forgiven, whose sins you retain are retained. I want to tap into that. No. I know by my experience that this is a renewal for me.

Now, what happened? Okay, the Resurrection is the miracle par excellence of the whole gospel. It is the high point, it is the incontrovertible proof that Jesus is the Savior of the world. It is the sign - the ultimate sign, the definitive sign, that he has won the game of redemption. No matter how rough it is out there. He has won, he is victory. And I would almost say that the Resurrection is an incarnation of optimism and mercy. And say, St. Josemaria encapsulates it very well in his homily *Christ's Presence in Christians* given on Easter in 1967: "Christ is alive. This is the great truth which fills our faith with meaning. Jesus who died on the Cross has risen. He has triumphed over death. He has overcome sorrow, anguish, and the power of darkness. 'Do not be terrified' was how the angels greeted the women who came to the tomb. 'Do not be terrified. You are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is risen. This is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad.'"

So that's kind of the backdrop, the Resurrection events begs the question - the Resurrection tells us that sins have been forgiven. What does that mean in the practice? We're not going to judge. But all we need to do is just step out of the confines of this Center and we'll see sins in spades and volume go up. In the newspaper, look at the news, and sin is alive and well. Maybe that's the wrong way of saying that it's- sin is alive and well. What does Our Lord do? We could have a whole year series of meditations on the Resurrection, but what's the first thing Our Lord says? What does he say? He says get the word out, and the very, very first just evangelizers, the absolute first evangelizers, maybe barring the Blessed Mother, are these holy women disciples of Jesus. They're madly in love with him. Their faith is not perfected yet. They're at the tomb and they're going to anoint him. They haven't figured out how they're going to move that big rock, but they didn't have to figure it out. It was moved. And they thought Our Lord was stolen. And Jesus appears to them and they're just euphoric over seeing him, and I don't know what they thought, but I don't know- I wouldn't be surprised as, you know, Jesus, let's hang out, let's catch up, you know, talk to us about this Resurrection. He maybe did, but it's not in the gospel. You told us you would rise from the dead, you were right, you know, kind of hard to buy into that, when you know, you went through what you went through, but you did tell us and you told us at least three times and we've been talking about it for the past year. Jesus doesn't say, okay, ladies, let's just chill. It's been a rough week. It's been my roughest week of my life or let's catch up or let's hang out. He says, go to the Apostles and tell them I'll meet them in Galilee. Get the word out.

And what does he tell the Apostles? Get the word out, feed my sheep, there's a joyful tension in the Resurrection. He appears and disappears and they can't decipher who he is, and they eventually do because he's trying to get us used to preaching him and loving him without seeing him. I mean, he's doing it on purpose and it's not business as usual, you know, let's take a cab and go to Capernaum and you know, chill out this afternoon with Jesus... Sunday afternoon, or maybe it's Saturday afternoon. No, we can imagine at the foot of the Cross this reservoir of merit that could forgive every single sin. I mean, Jesus merited the forgiveness of literally every single sin as much as you need but not the sin of the Holy Spirit. Okay. I knew

someone would think that. The sin of the Holy Spirit is a failure to use your freedom, a failure to repent, I don't want forgiveness, I can't be forgiven and you don't want to be forgiven of them. Okay, sounds like an oxymoron, but a sin against the Holy Spirit is sort of an oxymoron.

It's, you know, presumption that, you know, I'm not gonna do anything about this, God will forgive me. Or, its despair that I'm not going to do anything because I'm hopeless. But, it's a failure to use your freedom to come to God. So, every sin can be forgiven, but there's a reservoir, but we need a pipeline from that reservoir that is at the foot of the Cross, and the resurrected Jesus is waiting in that clear reservoir that could wash away every sin and turn every single person into a saint. He's won that much merit. It kind of helps to be God. Alright, when you're God, you can do those things. How do we get the reservoir to people? That's why Our Lord is saying I want you to be a witness. He says, "Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that the repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations." I want this message of forgiveness to go to everybody. I want everybody to be a recipient of mercy. How do I do this?

St. Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, repeats the same thing. You've got to be witnesses - start with Jerusalem, start with your own home, and get the message of mercy in concentric circles, and I want it to reach the end of the Earth. I don't want it to ever stop, that's why I came here. I want everybody to be a recipient of that mercy and our Holy Father is pushing that intensely. He's going to confession himself. He's hearing confessions. He's writing documents on the mercy- the face of God is Mercy, and so, that's where we come in. I would say it's working. The system is working. People go, oh, you're hearing a lot of confessions. Well- no, that's symptomatic of people, men and women, in trenches bringing people to confession. I keep telling, at least we preach to the Work, we'd be flipping hamburgers if we didn't have the lay women and lay men, you know, bringing people. And St. Josemaria says, you got to kill our priests with work. So, you know, I think a lot of times my brothers and sisters connected with Opus Dei take it literally.

Let's get a little bit of a close-up view of someone preaching the Resurrection. "And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven gathered together. And those who were with them who said the Lord has risen indeed and appeared to Simon. Then they told what had happened on the road and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread."

So, you see, even after 21 centuries an emotion, attention, and enthusiasm announce the Resurrection by witness, showing by who we are. And so, we can't bypass the holiness part. Again, St. Josemaria says in *Christ is Passing By*, in the same homily, "A Christian knows that he's grafted onto Christ through baptism. He is empowered to fight for Christ through confirmation, called to act in the world, sharing the royal, prophetic, and priestly role of Christ. He or she has become one and the same thing with Christ through the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity and love." And so, like Christ, he or she has to live for other people, loving each and everyone around- around him or her and indeed all humanity."

People are looking for that mercy. Not to give you another commercial break, but I've shared with you in the past that I'm afraid of airports, too - not only planes but airports. Planes because of the different cast of characters who've sat next to me. I never go incognito, I always go with my collar, so that kind of helps having interesting characters talk to you. And I- I really had to get a lot of my praying done, so, I hid behind a column, and I had my Divine Office and big column there, you know, in the waiting area. And I wanted to get it done in the waiting area because I don't know who's going to sit next to me. You know, I've had one grandmother who talked to me for two hours of what her grandchildren like to eat, what kind of desserts they like, whatever, you know, whatever it takes. So, someone sheepishly stuck his head around the corner and said, I presume you're hearing confessions - that's why you're hiding behind the column? I said yeah.... So, I had a stole, I put it on and all of a sudden, a big line right there. It was Lent, it was Lent - a big line. I said, well, so was- until I had to get on the plane. So I said well, I guess Plan B is to get it done on the plane. So, I'm sitting next to someone. This someone disappears. I figured he had to go to the restroom and someone else jumps in the chair. Is it valid to go to confession in the air? I go, yeah. So there's a little bit of that in the air.

So, what I'm saying is that they're looking - people want this, but we've got to prime the pump a little bit with the mercy - ourselves flawed, but revealing the heart of Christ - it's not something you're not doing, you're doing it. Again, it's not that you're not doing it, but we've got to do more of it. And that's what the New Evangelization is about. But how do we do that? How do we witness? I bypassed one of the most moving Gospel episodes when I said, you know, he returned and they announce the Resurrection of the eleven. And we don't have time - this could probably be another retreat, the walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus, his two disciples were totally discouraged - the cross is a horrific way of dying and they could not get themselves to believe the women. They couldn't get themselves to believe in Jesus' words that he would rise from the dead - not that he hid it, he revealed it. And so, they're returning back and this mysterious companion joins them in their walk back to Emmaus. And as we would put it in modern, colloquial terms, he's playing dumb, you know, and what is he doing? He's getting these guys to talk to him. This is basically my mental prayer, that we are walking with Our Lord whom we do not see and while they were talking and discussing together. Jesus himself drew near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. He's preparing his disciples to deal with him when they can't see him.

So, the Resurrection is sort of a transition period - he's in and he's out, and when he's in they still don't know it's him. Why? I'm weaning you away from seeing me. "But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?'" And I'm going to fast forward because this requires a retreat, and this is a meditation, it's not a retreat. And fast forward... we finish up, after this long, drawn-out conversation, they get to like him. Hey, where you going, stay here, remain with us. "This day is far spent. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him and he vanished out of their sight."

And I finish with this - "They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road while he opened to us the scriptures?' And they rose that very hour and returned to Jerusalem,

the place of Scandal and announced the Resurrection.” And that's what we need to do. How do I announce that Resurrection? Well, there's many ways to look at this? How do I transmit this mercy? How do I bring people to take advantage of Jesus' lavish spirit of forgiveness and his power to forgive? I need to talk so that my heart is burning within me and that I'm energized and I return to my own Jerusalem, whether it's a dorm, whether it's a home, whether it's workplace, and announce the Resurrection by my witness. Mary is a key character in this event. She is rejoicing exceedingly. We ask for her prayers of intercession so that we feel that sense of urgency to announce the Resurrection by our witness of joy, of peace, of mercy.

I thank you my God for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations you've communicate to me in this meditation. I ask your help to putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me. Holy Mary, Our Hope, Handmaid of the Lord... pray for us.



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