

Be Merciful

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text is from the Gospel according to St Luke, chapter 6 – ‘Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. This is our text.

In the Name of Jesus, Who by the cross was merciful. Amen.

Other than Jesus, can you think of anybody in all Holy Scripture who had greater reason to wish to get even with somebody than Joseph? But what do we see and learn in the Old Testament reading this morning? “Joseph said to them, ‘Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.’” He was not vengeful, but merciful.

Jesus is speaking to a great multitude of people. He has just appointed twelve of the disciples to be apostles. St Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus, says, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone.” The apostles are sent by God with a commission to speak the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. When the apostles speak, it is really the Holy Spirit of God speaking through them. For as Jesus said, “The one who hears you hears Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me, and the one who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.” He speaks words of blessing in the Beatitudes. But He also has words of woe for those who reject God’s word or who think because they are descendants of Abraham by birth have a free pass to Paradise. He tells all to love their enemies and be careful in judging others. Jesus speaks this to all people not just the Twelve. They are for our hearing, our understanding, and our action.

How are we doing? Are we merciful? When we judge others, is it so that we may be seen as better than we are in the eyes of the world? Do we exalt ourselves by making our neighbor less?

Often times when a person judges another, she is reminded, “Jesus said not to judge.” Pure and simple. What is meant by that retort? “Keep your business out of mine.” “Who do you think you are judging me?” Sometimes that assessment is correct; other times it is not. Jesus explains the command with the example of the man with a two-by-four in his eye as he tries to take a splinter out of the other man’s eye. It’s not a matter of not being able to see the splinter around the two-by-four. But confess the sin that you have committed and change your life before telling another not to sin. Paul writes, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”

Modern society likes to say, “Don’t you dare judge me,” but post-modern society has gone a step further along a path of destruction. With this game plan there is no mercy. I’m speaking about the “cancel culture” of the 21st century. We are called to confess our sins not only to God, but to our fellow man, but what is going on now? If one confesses a sin, they may be quote cancelled unquote.

What is cancel culture? A Christian apologist writes, “The Cancel Culture is a collective attempt to harm the reputation, livelihood, and social presence of people, products, TV shows, celebrities, employees, etc., for violating a particular ideological standard.” Cancelling can occur because a person is not on the right side of a topic. Think abortion, gun ownership, the whole LGBTQ-alphabet soup gender game, and the like. Some are trying, for example, to cancel Thomas Jefferson because he owned slaves. J.K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter series, has faced backlash for voicing her fears that the push for transgender rights will ultimately endanger women’s rights. Free speech is okay if it doesn’t run contrary to my speech. Some demand absolute tolerance by others, but the ones making the demand refuse to be tolerant themselves unless it fits into their agenda.

Is there any mercy involved with cancel culture or the woke movement? Not one bit. Everything about the cancel culture is the exact opposite of mercy. The proponents of the cancel culture would fight tooth-and-nail against at what I’m about to say. Cancel culture breeds hatred. It foments lack of trust. It is anything but

merciful. As its father, Marxism, pushed for a revolution by the proletariat (working class) against the Bourgeois, the elites of society. The modern class struggle, on the other hand, pits the so-called non-elites against the so-called white-supremacists. They cancellers spout a philosophy of systemic racism. Some of the non-elites better fit into the category of Bourgeois than of the proletariat.

What is the Christian to do? What is the Christian church to do because often times, the church bears the brunt of the attack? The church is often labeled as exclusive, bigoted, racist. The answer is easy. The doing is much more difficult. “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” Again, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus said, “But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

Let’s consider not only our Old Testament reading, but also Paul’s letter to the Roman Christians.

Paul writes to the Romans probably when Nero was emperor, even at the beginning of his reign. He put an end to the edict of expulsion and the denial of the right of assembly against the Jews, and by extension, of the Christians since they were considered a sect of the Jewish religion. However, toward the end of his reign he began to persecute Christians. Jesus had said, “you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” So whether there is active persecution going on or Paul is warning them of things to come, doesn’t matter. He says, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.... Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” Can we do that? When we are being ridiculed for no good reason, or worse yet, for something somebody else has done, it is hard to take. Recall the false accusations against Joseph. This was Jesus before the members of the Sanhedrin and before Pilate and Herod. They spit on Him, pulled His beard, and beat Him with sticks. Why did they do that? Because you sinned and He was born to live a perfect life, suffer the punishment you deserve, and to die. He was persecuted for somebody else – **you**.

Jesus humbled Himself, laying aside His divine powers and as true man didn’t strike back. He didn’t answer a word to their mockery. He has sent the Holy Spirit to strength your faith that you may live mercifully before your fellow man who mocks and ridicules you. You bear witness to God giving Him the glory as you suffer in His name.

Then there was Joseph. You know his story. His father loved him too much. His brothers hated him and sold him into slavery. His master’s wife tried to seduce him and when that didn’t work, she yelled “rape.” He landed in jail. But through it all, God was with him just as He was with the three men in the fiery furnace and with Daniel in the lion’s den. All of this was God in control and watching over all His children, including you and me.

In our reading, Joseph’s brothers send him a note in which their father pleads with Joseph not to deal with them in anger, but in mercy – “Your father gave this command before he died, “Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.” And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” He showed mercy to his brothers as God has shown him mercy. Joseph had been spoiled by his father. He was the first-born of Jacob’s favorite wife. He had dreams which he was able to interpret by the power of the Holy Spirit, and then he used those dreams to lord it over his brothers. Did he see the light of his sin when his brothers sold him into slavery; when the Ishmaelites carted him off to Egypt, or when he was rotting in an Egyptian dungeon? We aren’t told; all we know is that he did. When did you see the depravity of your life, your sins?

After Joseph hears Jacob’s plea for mercy for his brothers, he says, “Am I in the place of God?” Yes and no! He was not called or even empowered to seek revenge. In that regard he is not in the place of God. Nor are you. That belongs only to God. Moses spoke to the Israelites shortly before he died, “Vengeance is Mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly.’ For the Lord will vindicate His people and have compassion on His servants.” Paul quotes part of that in our Epistle reading. Vengeance is not ours, but mercy and blessing are. In that regard, Joseph, and

you and I, are in God's place. We bless our neighbor. We are merciful to our enemy. We forgive and love not because we must, but because we get to, because we are first forgiven and loved. Paul writes to the Ephesians, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." We are empowered by the Holy Spirit "For God loved the world in this way, He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him." We are merciful, blessing, forgiving, and loving because, as we sing with David, "Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever." Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.