

Chrism Mass Homily Notes
Tuesday, 22 March 2016, 11:00 am
Our Lady Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Cathedral
Most Reverend Daniel E. Thomas

Readings: Isaiah 61: 1-3a, 6a, 8b-9; Rev 1:5-8; Luke: 4:16-21.

“Jesus Christ is the Face of the Father’s Mercy” (MV 1). In him, we have access to the Mercy of God himself. Jesus is the door, the instrument and the means through whom we receive and encounter the very mercy of God. Through his anointing in the Holy Spirit and power, he revealed to the world the face of the Father. Each of us, through our anointing in the Holy Spirit and power at baptism, confirmation, and, for our priests, at holy orders, is called to reveal the face of his mercy. He desires that others might have access to his mercy through us.

We gather here this morning in this Cathedral, our mother Church, during this Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy given to us by our Holy Father, Pope Francis, to offer the one Mass which most powerfully symbolizes and effects our unity as a diocese: gathered as one – lay faithful, younger and older, men and women, consecrated religious, seminarians, deacons, priests and this bishop. We come from every corner of our diocese, from city streets to suburban neighborhoods to rural farmland. We come in this most holy of weeks to consecrate and bless the chrism and the oil to be used in anointing those who are called to receive, encounter and reveal the face of the mercy of God.

This is what we celebrate today in this Chrism Mass: In Christ Jesus, we have access to the mercy of God. For through our anointing into his Passion, Death and Resurrection, we have access to him, and when we fully live out that anointing, others gain access to him through us!

As in every Jubilee Year, the mercy of the Lord is made even more poignantly available by passage through the symbolic and iconic “Holy Door.” But Our Holy Father decided to make access to the Holy Door even more available this year by permitting Holy Doors throughout the world. We have our four Holy Doors in the Diocese of Toledo, here in Rosary Cathedral, in Bellevue at the Sorrowful Mother Shrine, in Carey at the Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation and in Paulding at Divine Mercy Parish. Pope Francis said that the Great Holy Door is the symbol of God’s mercy, which welcomes our repentance, and offers us the grace of forgiveness; a door which is opened generously, but whose threshold must be crossed with courage.

The Holy Door has been made accessible to us. We are invited to prayerfully cross its threshold many times this year, to receive and encounter the Lord’s mercy. And while there are these physical Church doors, we are reminded (Pope Francis) that there is also the door of our heart, which we open to receive all God’s forgiveness and to give it in turn, welcoming all those who knock on our door.

Even as by our anointing we have access to the mercy of God in the Holy Door, so by our anointing each of us becomes a door, an instrument of mercy. What we have received we give as a gift. Others need access to the Lord's mercy through a door. That door is each of us!

By the anointing with oil or chrism we received in baptism, confirmation or, for our priests, holy orders, we become doors, as it were, to his mercy. Living doors, living instruments who provide others a way to meet God's infinite mercy.

What an amazing artistic representation we have right here in our Cathedral of the mercy of the Lord, rendered in the figures of the oak carved panels on the doors of each confessional. These are the images which grace our Chrism Mass worship aid today. In them, we have a stunning reminder of how each of us, though sinners, has access to the mercy of God through Christ, and how through us, others are to gain and have that access as well.

We all stand in need of forgiveness, but we do so as men and women anointed in Christ who gave up his life for us, who forgives any sin, and who strengthens us in grace not to fall back into sin when we are tempted.

The door of the confessional is the singular door through which, when we enter with courage, humility and true sorrow, we are blessed to receive, encounter and are sent out to reveal the mercy of

the Lord.

Pope Francis, who repeatedly refers to himself as a sinner ever in need of the mercy of the Lord, has a wonderful phrase: “The confessional is not a torture chamber.” To that, I would humbly add: instead, “the confessional is a parlor of love.”

In this Lent of this Jubilee Year of Mercy, our priests have made personal sacrifices to make the sacrament of reconciliation more available to the faithful. Thank you dear brothers for the time, energy and devotion you have given to welcome back the sinner. Thank you dear faithful for making the sacrament of penance a more frequent priority. How blessed we priests have been to witness so many taking advantage of this grace, to hear the confessions of those away a month, a year, twenty years or forty years: repentant sinners who returned to encounter the Lord’s tender mercy.

The other door to mercy is of course the living door of each person baptized and confirmed into the Body of Christ, each of our lay faithful, in whom others discover and can enter the mercy of God. When do you reveal the face of the Lord’s mercy? When you patiently love, invite and encourage - that son or daughter who has fallen away from the faith, the divorced and remarried family member, the coworker who mocks or belittles your faith, the neighbor who lives in a same sex union, the person who has held a grudge and has refused to speak for years, the friend who is caught in an habitual sin. For all

of them, you reveal the face of the Lord's mercy. Dear faithful of the diocese of Toledo, be the face of the Lord's mercy.

Why? Because, unlike some who would distort and misrepresent what the Holy Father has said, this Great Jubilee Year of Mercy does not mean anything goes, it means: anything forgiven! Remember when Jesus asked the woman caught in adultery – “is there anyone left to condemn you? No sir. Neither do I condemn you. But go, and sin no more.”

Through the living door of each priest ordained into the person of Christ the Head, others have the most eminent access to his infinite mercy in the sacraments, in their preaching, and in their daily ministry. Dear brother priests, Jesus the Priest who offered himself to the Father wishes to offer you his mercy each day, and wishes you in your very flesh to be a door to his mercy. From my heart, on behalf of all the faithful, I thank you for your faithful priestly ministry, for your respect and obedience, and I offer you this word of encouragement and support: no one else can reveal the face of Mercy like the priest! You are that face every time you anoint the sick, every time you baptize, every time you consecrate the Body and Blood of the Lord in Mass. You are that face every time you raise your hand in absolution of the repentant sinner in Confession. You are his face here in the Diocese of Toledo. You are the face of the Lord's mercy for your people, and for me. My prayer for you is that

you will draw on the grace you were given on the day of your priestly ordination when your hands were covered with sacred Chrism by the Bishop, so you may persevere in joyful, humble and holy witness; conscious of the strength that flows from your priestly anointing to accomplish all things for the sake of his mercy. Dear brother priests, I pray that together, you and I might ever more evidently become the Face of Jesus' mercy!

Each of us, anointed into Christ, the anointed Son of God, is in need of His mercy, and each of us is called to be the face of his mercy. In this Jubilee Year, we are all invited ever more intensely to encounter and reveal the mercy of God by living out the Corporal works of mercy: Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. And by the grace of our anointing in Christ, to exercise the spiritual works: Admonish the sinner, instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, bear wrongs patiently, forgive all injuries, and pray for the living and the dead.

Each of us, through our chosen vocation, is called to be an instrument of healing, who mediates the divine mercy which the Father revealed in the face of Jesus his son, that same mercy which Jesus the Son wishes to have us reveal in our daily lives, in our thoughts, words and deeds, so that indeed we become the Face of the merciful Jesus.

“It is impossible to conceive of a true Christian who is not merciful, just as it is impossible to understand God without his mercy. It is the key word of the Gospel: mercy. It is the fundamental feature of Christ’s face, the face that we recognize....when he goes towards the people, when he heals the sick, when he sits at the table with sinners, and above all, when nailed to the Cross. He forgives. There we see the face of divine mercy. Let us not be afraid: let us be embraced by the mercy of God, who awaits and forgives all. Nothing is sweeter than his mercy” (Pope Francis, Angelus Dec. 8, 2015)

In a few moments the sweet aroma of the oil and Chrism to be blessed will become a powerful sign for us of the sweet aroma of the mercy of God. This is the mercy we will meet anew on Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. When we were baptized, our heads we anointed with Chrism and our chests with the oil of catechumens.

If we have received the anointing of the sick, our hands and our heads were anointed with that oil. If we are ordained priests, our hands were anointed with chrism to offer sacrifice. And when consecrated a bishop, the chrism was poured over my head, an anointing to teach, govern and sanctify the flock.

“The Name of God is Mercy” is the title of Pope Francis’ recently published book. Mercy “has long been the cornerstone of his faith and is now the central teaching of his papacy” (frontice

piece). The Holy Father writes:

“To follow the way of the Lord, the Church is called on to pour its mercy over all those who recognize themselves as sinners, who assume responsibility for the evil they have committed, and who feel in need of forgiveness. The Church does not exist to condemn people, but to bring about an encounter with the visceral love of God’s mercy.”

“Jesus Christ is the Face of the Father’s Mercy.” In him we have access to the Mercy of God himself. At this Chrism Mass, we rejoice that through our anointing in baptism, confirmation or, for our priests, in holy orders, that we have been conformed to Jesus, who is the door, the instrument, the access, the means through whom we receive and encounter the very mercy of God. Today, Jesus intends that we become ever more vibrantly the instrument, the means, for others to have an encounter with the mercy of God, to reveal the face of his mercy. Jesus desires that others might have access to his mercy through a living door: each of us.

In the blessing and consecration of the oils in this Chrism Mass, and in the celebration of the Paschal Triduum, may we receive, encounter and reveal “Jesus Christ, the Face of the Father’s Mercy.”

*Thursday of the Lord's Supper at the Evening Mass
24 March 2016, 7:30 pm
Our Lady Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Cathedral
Most Reverend Daniel E. Thomas*

Readings: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Cor 11:23-26; John 13:1-15.

“Jesus Christ is the Face of the Father’s Mercy” (MV 1). With these words our Holy Father inaugurated the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy in which we find ourselves, within which we now begin the Sacred Triduum. Inspired by these words, we come to reflect on, to enter into, and to celebrate Jesus Christ, who is the face of the Father’s mercy.

Here in this Mass of the Lord’s Supper, tomorrow in the Liturgy of Good Friday, and on Saturday and Sunday in the celebration of Easter, Jesus reveals to us once again the merciful face of the Father. This evening, Jesus reveals that face in the flesh: the living flesh of his body and blood under the form of bread and wine, which he first gave to the apostles at the Last Supper and which he gives to us in every Mass. This evening Jesus reveals that face in the flesh: the living flesh of his priests, the apostles to whom he gave the priesthood on that first Holy Thursday, and that priesthood which is shared by every priest who has been ordained into the ministry of sacrifice and sacred service. This evening, Jesus reveals that face in the flesh: the flesh with which he bows low as the

servant of all to wash the feet of the apostles, giving them a model to follow, “as I have done for you, you should also do,” even washing the feet of the one who would betray him.

Gathered here in Rosary Cathedral, we unite ourselves with all of the faithful in each parish and institution celebrating this Mass of the Lord’s Supper throughout our Diocese, indeed with all our fellow Catholics, and soon to be Catholics, throughout the world. In these Liturgies of the Triduum, the Passion, Death and Resurrection are celebrated and are sacramentally made present anew for us.

This evening, we enter once more into the mercy of the Father, made flesh for us in the person of his son revealed to us on Holy Thursday, the face revealed in the Institution of the Holy Eucharist, in the Institution of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the Priesthood, and in the institution of that servanthood which would mark the true disciple of Jesus, the washing of the feet.

The Mercy of God was revealed in the Old Testament reading from the Book of Exodus we heard. Before the Jewish people were about to be liberated from their slavery, the Lord instructed that the blood of the lamb they would consume at table would be smeared on the lintels of their doorposts, and in his mercy, seeing the blood, the Lord would “Passover them;” but through the angel of death would destroy any who did not have the blood of the lamb

of sacrifice marking their homes. This was the mercy of the Lord extended to his chosen people. Now, we are that chosen people. We are the ones who come for the Passover meal, not a supper of roasted lamb and herbs, but the supper of the Lamb of God, the very flesh and blood of Christ Jesus himself. This is the lamb of whom we partake tonight, this is the lamb who feeds us with himself, this is the lamb who feeds us with his flesh and blood, not marking the doors of our homes, but marking our bodies and lips and souls, to save us not from Pharaoh, but from our sins and from the ancient enemy. This Holy Eucharist is our Pasch, our Passover, not from slavery to Pharaoh, but from the slavery to sin.

The mercy of God was revealed in the New Testament reading we heard proclaimed from Saint Paul to the Corinthians. This was the very mercy of God announced in the very first kerygma, the first proclamation of the Gospel: that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread and gave us his body, his flesh. And he took wine, and gave us his blood in the new covenant. This merciful act preceded and prefigured the offering of his body and the outpouring of his blood on the cross. This was the merciful face of the father revealed for all humanity. The priesthood which the Lord Jesus conferred that first Holy Thursday evening was not limited to those apostles gathered with him in the Upper Room, but was

extended for all time to us, through the laying on of hands and the anointing of priests, ordained to offer sacrifice for the salvation of all.

The mercy of God was revealed for us in the Gospel we heard, in that powerful scene of the last supper from John's Gospel. The power lies not in some display of greatness, but precisely in a display of humility. Jesus washes the feet of the apostles, even as Peter objects. Yet he instructs them that, as they call him master and teacher, so they should learn from him and wash each other's feet. He gave them a model to follow, a model of selfless, lowly, service. This is the Jesus who desires that we become his flesh in the world, we become his mercy for others, and we follow his model so as to bow low and offer humbly service to our brothers and sisters in need.

In the just published book of interviews with Pope Francis, entitled: "The Name of God is Mercy," here's what he writes: "What we have received freely, we give freely. We are called to serve Christ the Crucified through every [marginalized] person. We touch the flesh of Christ in the one who is outcast, hungry, thirsty, naked, imprisoned, ill, unemployed, persecuted in search of refuge. That is where we find our God, that is where we touch the Lord."

This evening, once again, Jesus, the "Face of the Father's

Mercy, takes flesh: in the Body and Blood which we will consecrate, receive and adore; in the priest who stands in the person of Christ for us; and in each baptized person who, with humility, serves with self-sacrificing love his brothers and sisters.

This evening, in this Mass of the Lord's supper, and please God each day in the future, we will make present: "Jesus Christ, the Face of the Father's Mercy" (MV 1).

*Friday of the Passion of the Lord
Good Friday, 25 March 2016, 3:00 pm
Our Lady, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Cathedral
Most Reverend Daniel E. Thomas*

Readings: Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John: 18:1-19:42.

“Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy” (MV 1). At this hour, when the whole Church mourns the death of her saviour in the celebration of the Lord’s Passion, we gaze upon that face which has revealed the Father’s Mercy: a face now marred with buffets and spitting; a face now covered in blood and the dust of the earth from falling under the Cross; a face now bruised, swollen and almost unrecognizable to his mother and beloved disciple who stand at the foot of the Cross. Yet this is the face of God! This is the face of mercy!

This is how God chose to reveal himself: in the marred face of his Son on the Cross, the suffering servant spoken of in the reading from the Prophet Isaiah we just heard. “Even as many were amazed at him - so marred was his look beyond human semblance, and his appearance beyond that of the sons of man - so shall he startle many nations, because of him kings shall stand speechless; for those who have not been told shall see, those who have not heard shall ponder it.”

But why had it come to this, why was his face so disfigured? The same reading foretold the reason: “Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured...He was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins...by his stripes we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, each following his own way; but the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all.” The face of Jesus, God himself, as he hung upon the Cross, reflected the pain, the agony, the filth, the misery, the darkness and the

ugliness: of our sins. “He was spurned and avoided by people, a man of suffering, one of those from whom people hide their faces, spurned, and we held him in no esteem.” And yet in that face we see the tender, loving and inviting mercy of God for us.

This is the face that looks on each of us today from the Cross, with forgiveness, love and compassion, inviting us to turn away from our sins, to embrace his mercy, and to become the face of mercy for those who, because of their sins or the sins of others, are in desperate need of that mercy. We might see ourselves as spurned avoided by people, men and women of suffering. Yet He looks on us with mercy. And he desires to look with mercy on others with His mercy evident in our faces: those from whom people hide their faces, those who are spurned, those who are held in no esteem.

The Lord whose marred face would be transformed into the glorious shining face of the Resurrected Lord, desires that, despite our struggles with the crosses which we carry, that we accept his loving mercy, and that our faces in turn can shine for those who seek his mercy.

How can we be so bold? Because as the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.”

And so in a few minutes we will approach the throne of mercy: the Cross. Each one of us is invited to come in procession to reverence the

Cross, with a genuflection, a bow, a kiss, a touch or an embrace.

As we approach to adore the Cross, Jesus Christ, the face of the Father's mercy, is revealing himself to us. As you approach, I invite to look upon his face, not a face of anger or judgment or meanness or cruelty, but a face of loving forgiveness for each of us, sinners sorry for our sins.

Listen to what our Holy Father said in his new book, "The Name of God is Mercy:"

"Mercy will always be greater than any sin, no one can put a limit on the all forgiving God. Just by looking at him, just by raising our eyes from ourselves and our wounds, we leave an opening for the action of his grace. Jesus performs miracles with our sins, with what we are, with our nothingness, with our wretchedness" (NGM 86).

In response to the question: Can there be mercy without acknowledgment of one's sins? Pope Francis writes: "Mercy exists, but if you don't recognize yourself as a sinner, it means you don't want to receive it, it means that you don't feel the need for it. If we do not begin by examining our wretchedness, if we stay lost in despair that we will never be forgiven, we end up licking our wounds, and they stay open and never heal. Instead there is medicine, there is healing, we only need take a small step toward God" (NGM 57, 58).

So come, let us prepare to take that step toward God, as we venerate the Cross of Jesus, the face of the Father's mercy.