



Diocese
of Toledo

MEMORANDUM

TO: Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Leaders

FROM: Mr. David McCutchen *Dmc*
Chairperson
Toledo Diocesan Year of Mercy Committee

Rev. Msgr. Charles E. Singler *CEs*
Director
Office of Worship

RE: Homiletic and Liturgical Resources on
the Spiritual Work of Mercy: *Admonishing the Sinner*
for Sunday, February 7, 2016 * Fifth Sunday of the Year

DATE: 20 January 2016

Some weeks ago a notice was forwarded to clergy and parish leaders regarding a number of initiatives that have been planned for the Year of Mercy in the Diocese of Toledo. The attached materials offer resources relative to Sunday Masses that have been designated for one of the seven spiritual works of mercy. These resources include 1) an exegetical commentary on the Sunday Mass readings prepared by Msgr. Kenneth Morman, 2) a sample homily on the spiritual work of mercy, 3) a short bulletin announcement (excerpt) on the spiritual work of mercy, 4) a prepared intercession to be included during the Universal Prayer at Mass on the designated weekend. Finally, a listing of the designated weekends and their assigned topics has also been included with this mailing. Upcoming resources for these designated weekends will be forwarded to you directly several weeks prior to the date and will be made available on the weekly *Nuntius*. Any questions concerning these resources can be directed to the Office of Worship.

YEAR OF MERCY

EXEGETICAL COMMENTARY

Sunday, February 7, 2015

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Spiritual Work of Mercy: Admonish the Sinner

Isaiah 6:1-2a,3-8

This passage consists of the call of Isaiah; the half verse missing is the description of the cherubim having six wings – “*with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they hovered aloft.*” (Why the lectionary would have excised that part of the verse is not clear; maybe because some commentators think that the reference to the “feet” is a euphemism for the genitals? Even if that would be true, there couldn’t be many in the normal Sunday congregation who would even be aware of that as a possibility.)

In any case, this passage is a treasure, almost every line invites comment. Isaiah’s call comes in the year King Uzziah died. That would be around 740 BC; the chronology is disputed here, but not the import of the date – as people today mentally date things by the events of 9/11, so this was a traumatic event in the history of Israel: the king died, and there was great anxiety that now the Assyrians would invade and swallow up the country.

In this context of heightened anxiety, Isaiah has a mystical experience in the temple. As Solomon prayed so correctly at its dedication, if the heavens and earth cannot contain God, how could this little temple he had built? This is how Isaiah’s vision handles that problem: God is reigning over all, high above in heaven, but the train of his garment suffuses the temple, so this is where worshipers can truly have access to him.

In his mystical experience Isaiah is aware of what’s going on around him, but now it’s all surreal; elements of the liturgy are morphing into other things. He sees seraphim – “fiery

ones” – burning spirits hovering around the all-holy God. (In Ezekiel also, God is enthroned in fire; this detail marks out God clearly as wholly other, for no created life-form can live in fire!) But even these exotic creatures need to veil their faces in the presence of God (the omitted half verse); no creature can look upon God; he’s too holy, it’s like looking at the sun.

Their awed song of praise, “*Holy, holy, holy!*” – the “*trisagion*” – is used not only in the Jewish liturgy but in all the liturgies of Christianity, East and West, as well. In the case of each prophet, his inaugural vision made an indelible impression on him that echoes through all his subsequent words – it’s no surprise, given this vision, that Isaiah becomes profoundly impressed with the holiness / the wholly otherness of God; any impression that human kings control history is an illusion – Isaiah sees, and insists in all his subsequent oracles, that God is more powerful than any human agency and it is his will that will prevail!

The surreality continues – at the sound of the cry of the fiery ones, Isaiah is profoundly shaken but it feels to him like it’s the temple itself that is shaking. It is filled with smoke (“*house*” = *bayit* = the ordinary way of referring to the Temple) – just as when one dreams, what’s really going on in the room gets worked right into the dream, so the smoke of the sacrifice gets worked into Isaiah’s vision.

He by now has become acutely aware of his unworthiness to be in the presence of the all-holy God; he is terrified – but rather than be struck down dead, he sees one of the seraphim fly to him holding an ember which he had taken with tongs from the altar (another element from

the liturgical ceremony going on) and touches Isaiah's lips with it. (Envision someone taking a white hot briquet from your barbecue and touching your lips with it – ssssssssssss!) But in this case instead of pain and mutilation, what emerges is purification: “*See, now that this has touched your lips, your wickedness is removed, your sin purged.*”

Then he hears the voice of the Lord asking, “*Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?*” (The plural is probably due to the Lord associating the heavenly court with him or is a “deliberative” plural: as in the “us” in “Hmmm, Let’s see...,” since Hebrew did not have a “plural of majesty” as when Queen Victoria famously said “We are not amused,” and this is far earlier than any awareness of the Trinity). The purification is for mission – “*Here I am; send me!*” Isaiah replies with alacrity and eagerness. Isaiah's personality comes through here – contrast Jeremiah at his call (Jer 1:6) or Moses' reaction at the burning bush when God wants to send him to Pharaoh – “Ah, Lord God, not me – send someone else!” (Ex 3:11ff) But not Isaiah – he's full of self-confidence: I can do it – send me! (Which may be an indirect confirmation that he was a member of the nobility: he's educated, he's not afraid.)

If the homilist would want to incorporate the insights of this passage into a reflection on the spiritual work of mercy of admonishing the sinner, it might come by way of reference to the role of the prophets in Israel in general which was precisely to admonish sinners, to function, as Fr. Bruce Vawter put it, as “the conscience of Israel,” to remind kings, priests, and the powerful as much as ordinary people of God's covenantal demands. As this scene illustrates, Isaiah took up this responsibility not reluctantly but wholeheartedly. It could also be pointed out that Isaiah's experience also illustrates that this work of mercy requires purification of ourselves first – as Jesus said, “*How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me remove that splinter in your eye,’ when you do not even notice the wooden beam in your own eye? You*

hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye.” (Lk 6:42)

1Corinthians 15:1-11

This passage too is a treasure. By way of background, Paul is responding here to push-back he is receiving from his converts in Corinth concerning what he has taught them regarding the resurrection of the dead. They are beginning to balk at this. What lies behind their objection is the typically Greek conception of body and soul, where the body is viewed to be like a prison for the soul (in the famous platonic aphorism, *sôma sêma*). In this view, the whole goal of life is to be able to put down this wearying bag of bones and soar, liberated, as free, bodyless spirits. The prospect of putting the oppressive body right back on again after just being freed of it was not good news but disheartening to the Corinthians.

In other words, they assumed that when Paul talked about resurrection, he was talking about re-animating corpses, mere resuscitation to present-day life, like what happened to Lazarus. Their contention is that, as a hope, this is ridiculous – everybody knows that when people are dead, they stay dead; if they ever get up again, then that means they weren't really dead in the first place, because, by definition, death is that point from which there is no more rising up again; therefore, again by definition, resurrection is impossible....

Paul's response to that contention is utterly logical and adamant: if something happens, then it's obviously possible for it to happen. And the resurrection did happen to Jesus – he recounts the solemn creedal tradition to this effect. It all depends on this. This passage is so important because it is the earliest teaching of Christ's resurrection that we have, antedating the first gospel (that of Mark) by some 14 years.

When he says “*I hand on to you what I myself received,*” he is using the technical terms (*parédôka=masâr / parélabon=qibbel*) for the

handing on and receiving of official Jewish tradition. Where Paul would have received this tradition is presumably from the Christian community at Damascus who would have instructed him after his dramatic experience of the risen Christ on the road thereunto; it is possible that he may have received some information also from the community of disciples in Antioch and in Jerusalem when he went up to meet with Peter and James in 37 AD. When he tells the Galatians (1:12) that he did not receive his gospel from any human being nor was he taught it, he is referring to the *meaning* of it all; *that* has come to him by revelation, not such practical historical details as who saw the risen Jesus when.

We have no information regarding the specifics of the time or circumstances of the appearances to the five hundred brothers at once, to James, or to “all the apostles” (as distinguished from “the Twelve,” who are mentioned at the beginning). The fact that he refers to his own experience on the road to Damascus as one of the series shows that he assumes that his personal experience was equivalent to the others, even if it was as to a “miscarriage” (*ektrôma*). He uses that bold word to express his conviction that he is an apostle equal in rights to all the others, even if he came late on the scene, outside of the normal process of gestation, namely the grooming of his disciples for this role that the others received from Jesus. (He connects the two realities, by the way: “*Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen the Lord?*” – 1Cor 9:1) It is in this respect only that he is “*the least of the apostles,*” viz., because he persecuted the Church. He will argue vehemently in Galatians and 2Corinthians that in every other respect he is not one whit less than the self-styled “super-apostles” who have seduced his converts away from his gospel. (for example 2Cor 11:4-5 and 12:11)

If the homilist would want to incorporate the insights of this passage into a reflection on admonishing the sinner, it might come by way

of reference to Paul’s ministry as a whole – in his letters he always has a substantial section of parenthesis, repeatedly instructing and correcting the failures of his converts, even if in today’s selection it’s more a case of the correction of a mistaken idea than of sin. There may even be a hint of a possible tactic here – instead of railing against them for their failings (as he in fact does do in other letters!) here he commends the very people he corrects for their “standing firm” in the faith, even as he warns them of the possibility that it might all be in vain if they fall away from it now! Sometimes carrots work better than sticks!

Luke 5:1-11

Repeating much of what I shared with you before many years ago, this pericope is a fascinating example of Luke’s skill in composition and use of sources. In order to provide a psychologically plausible basis for Jesus’ first disciples, Peter, Andrew, James, and John, to follow him, he pushes the story of their call back four chapters from where it is found in Mark to give time for them to hear his preaching and teaching and witness his work(s) of power. (Luke saw already what the anti-Christian Celsus did in the following century; the latter used Mark’s call narrative as an argument proving that the first disciples were clearly men of low intelligence, because they left everything merely because some stranger walking by invited them to.)

Then, instead of just using that very succinct Marcan version, he makes use of another tradition about their call he had become aware of in the process of “investigating everything accurately anew,” interviewing “the eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word” (Lk 1:2-3). This tradition John used too in chapter 21 of his gospel. In the Johannine version, it’s a second call, to re-follow Jesus after the resurrection. Luke understands it to be the first call and uses it here.

He derives the setting from Mk 4:1 (when he gets that far in Mark, he will skip this

reference to Jesus teaching from the boat in order to create breathing room since he's already used it here). The Johannine and Lucan versions of the story contain many common elements – Fr. Joe Fitzmyer, crediting Fr. Ray Brown, singles out many points in common between them, for example: {1} the disciples had fished all night but caught nothing; {2} Jesus directs them to cast the net(s) for a catch; {3} the extraordinary haul of fish which results; {4} the mention of the effect of this on the net(s); {5} Simon Peter reacts to the catch (in John's version the Beloved Disciple precedes him); {6} Jesus is addressed as "Lord"; {7} other fishermen take part in the haul but say nothing; {8} the "following" of Jesus occurs at the end (in John, at vv. 19, 22); {9} the catch of fish symbolizes a successful missionary endeavor (explicit in Luke); and {10} the use of the double name "Simon Peter" for Peter – this usage occurs only here in Luke (everywhere else Luke always calls him only Simon prior to 6:14 where Jesus changes his name, and simply "Peter" after that). The use of the same words in both accounts for getting on board, landing, the net, etc. may well be coincidental. In contrast with Mk 1:16, both accounts agree in omitting any mention of Andrew, though the verbs in vv. 4, 6, and 7 are in the plural showing that Luke is envisioning someone else in the boat with Peter, an echo of the Marcan story.

There are also contrasts between John's version and Luke's: in John, {1} Jesus is not recognized at first; {2} Jesus is on shore, not in the boat; {3} Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple are in the same boat; {4} Peter leaves the hauling in of the fish to others; {5} the net is explicitly said not to be torn (this may not be a contradiction: Luke says the nets "were breaking," which is probably a conative imperfect meaning "starting to" or "about to" break); {6} the fish are caught close to shore and dragged to it; {7} Peter rushes through the water to the Lord, whom he has recently denied (in Luke he begs Jesus to depart from him but the motive of awareness of unworthiness is the

same). The explanation for these similarities and dissimilarities seems to be, as noted above, that both John and Luke have made use of the same tradition about Jesus; but each has placed it in a context and retold it in a way that would best make the point he was trying to get across.

A few other points could be mentioned – when Peter says "Depart from me, *Lord*," *kyrie* in context could mean not much more than "sir," and Peter's reaction to the miracle can be explained simply as that of a human being who realizes that he has come to be in the sphere of the divine, where he is unworthy to be (cf. Isaiah in the first reading). On the other hand, both the reaction and even the words ("Lord" as a post-resurrectional title and "Stop being afraid," a present imperative in v. 10) would fit very well the setting John assumes, an appearance of the risen Lord to Peter shortly after the disciple had denied him.

It has often been noted that Jesus' metaphor in its Marcan version, "fishers of human beings," is not the happiest since what fishermen do to the beings they catch is to take them out of the water, kill and eat them. This may be why Luke changes the expression, using a compound Greek verb, *zôgreô*, that means, literally, to "catch-alive." The effect is to shade the meaning toward "to rescue."

We notice that in Luke's version even though the whole group of initial disciples is mentioned by name just here (except Andrew! Could this have been just an oversight? Or maybe because it's just these three who form the innermost core around Jesus at later events such as the Transfiguration [Lk 9:28], the raising of Jairus' daughter [Lk 8:51] and, in Matthew and Mark, the Agony in the Garden [Mk 14:33], they are the only three he is interested in accounting for?), this commission in his version is directed to Peter alone (he uses a singular verb here – contrast Mk 1:17). This is consistent with the pre-eminence that Luke accords Peter throughout this passage – it's his boat, the dialogue is with him – and indeed in his two-volume work as a whole (e.g., omitting

Jesus' reprimand of him [9:18-22], mentioning that Jesus prayed specifically for him and gave him the mission to strengthen the faith of the others after his fall [22:31-32], largely dedicating the first half of Acts to his ministry, etc.)

A final, typically Lucan touch is observable in the fact that in Mark's version Peter (and Andrew) leave their nets and follow Jesus; in Luke they leave "everything" to do so – in Luke's gospel Jesus' disciples must not merely be favorably disposed toward the poor, they must be poor – *"In the same way, every one of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple."* (Lk 14:33)

It's a stretch, but if the homilist would want to incorporate the insights of this passage into a reflection on admonishing the sinner, it might come in the minor detail that Peter (and Andrew) had to call to their companions to help them "rescue" the huge number of fish they were encountering. In a similar way, we need to help each other live out our Christian commitment so that we can end up being brought to life with Jesus.....

YEAR OF MERCY

Sample Lord's Day Homily
Admonish the Sinner

Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time
Sunday, February 7, 2016

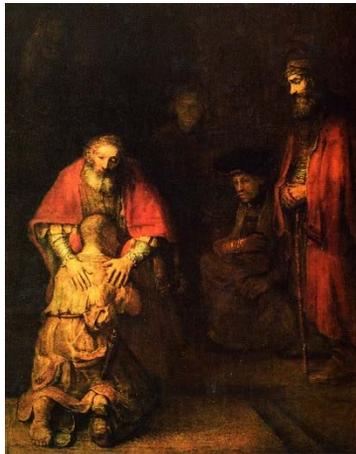
Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8; Psalm 138; I Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

Admitting our sins is no easy thing. In a culture that prides itself on success and self-promotion to get what we want or deserve, such a confession is a real struggle for many. And yet, in the way of faith, there is something freeing deeply in the recesses of the soul when we come to terms with our sinfulness. Sometimes that insight emerges over the course of time after repeated experiences, or when our actions result in hurting others in a way that causes them to point them out to us. While the latter may seem a bold step, sometimes we simply need to be told that our words and actions have brought hurt and harm to others and to ourselves. This approach is conveyed in the spiritual work of mercy – *Admonishing the sinner* – the first of seven homiletic reflections to be preached in the parishes of our diocese during the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

At first glance, the word “admonish” may seem harsh, even self-righteous to our ears, but the intent is one of urgency. Dictionaries offer us the perspective that admonishing another seeks to give advice, to urge, to reprove or to warn. There is no doubt that we live in a culture of political correctness, that what we say and how we

communicate it with others will often dictate how something will be interpreted. Some people admit that anytime they wish to express concern over behavior that is wrong to someone they care about can often be like the proverbial exercise of “walking on eggshells” – first regarding the reputation of the other person and more pointedly their personal feelings.

One concrete example that may offer a perspective to understand the issue at hand is the adult family member who is no longer practicing their faith with regular church attendance and the elderly parents who harbor a tremendous guilt in their heart because they feel they did not do enough to foster the faith for their child at a younger age. From time to time, either parent has



expressed their concern to the member that they are missing out on the faith that has been the backbone of the family. Initially, it was a matter of subtle reminders, then it was raised to the level of shouting matches during holiday gatherings to the point that the member and parents no longer speak to one another. Great pain has fractured a relationship in this household. Interaction to create an open communication requires a

certain level of patience and a desire to express things sensibly. And, a tremendous amount of trust that God will guide and oversee any conversion that is needed on the part of the family member and the parents. Who is to say that conversion is not or has not been underway for the adult member, but has required time to align all the needed aspects of returning to the Church?

Imagine if wrongdoing was never pointed out to the person who was hurting others and themselves. Thus begins a snowball effect of repetitive behavior that worsens to the point that it becomes uncontrollable and perhaps life-threatening. Toleration in this regard can move to a level of avoidance and alienation.

Since his election as the spiritual leader of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis has provided a model of reference that may assist the modern day followers of Jesus to fulfill the spiritual work of mercy: “admonishing the sinner”. While media outlets have tried to paint a picture of the Pope as a progressive reformer, most church leaders around the world have assessed the fact that Pope Francis’ style, his approach or witness, has won many hearts to see the Church and the Catholic faith as a means to salvation. This is to say that how we express ourselves, the context in which those touchy topics are discussed and the motivation that prompts our interaction are just as important and integral to the teachings or the content of the faith. Perhaps this is the place to call to mind a practical idiom: “You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar”. In other words, the

way we say something will, in fact, guide the direction a conversation may go. Seizing the appropriate time and context to bring a matter to the attention of another person will often provide the means to a healthy and lasting healing.

At first glance, we might wonder what connection admonishing sinners and the call of the disciples in the gospel today have to do with one another. Actually, they have everything to do with one another. The underlying current of faith throughout this fishing encounter of Simon Peter and the disciples is the call each of us has received to go forth into the deep waters of life to find the catch of souls that wander about – those that have perhaps been believers at one time, but have been duped by the world into thinking they themselves are the point of origin in life, or those who simply have been misguided by popular whims or fads that have no lasting effect or stability. And just as those in the fishing profession need to know the method and craft of their art, so too, Christians need to know the way to get to the heart of those who still wander or are estranged from the Church or from God.

The words of Jesus himself to Simon Peter are entrusted to us when we find ourselves in the act of admonishing the sinner: “Do not be afraid”. They are words of encouragement. They are words intended to free us from hesitation. It is a command to step forward, relying on God along the way, trusting that His grace motivates us to be the means of bringing others closer to Him. Our task is to consider how and what we say.

We are not far from beginning the observance of Lent, a time when our shortcomings are brought to mind and our alignment to a holiness of life is forged. Perhaps with the Jubilee Year of Mercy as a reference point, this Lent will find us reflecting and enacting the spiritual works of mercy with greater fervor, knowing that the Lord does not want us or anyone else to be afraid.

Monsignor Charles E. Singler

YEAR OF MERCY
Admonishing the Sinner
For February 6 & 7, 2016

PARISH BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT

Fraternal correction requires discernment in order to choose the right moment; to correct so as to increase and not decrease a brother's self-esteem; to exercise it only in truly essential things; to strive to make free rather than to judge and condemn; to correct knowing that you are a sinner and in need of correction. If all this happens, the fraternal correction suggested by "admonish the sinner" may bear the fruit of peace and of blessing.

—Excerpt from *The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, Pastoral Resources for Living, Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, 2015*

INTERCESSION DURING THE UNIVERSAL PRAYER
To be included with the prepared intercessions

That all will heed the command of Jesus today to cast off into the deep in an effort to find the lost and wandering in the world, and in charity welcome the sinner home. We pray to the Lord.

Or

For those who have been lost by their sin and weakness, that we will be a source of strength and a means of assisting them to return to the love of Christ Jesus. We pray to the Lord.

Year of Mercy
Diocese of Toledo

Schedule of Special Homilies
on the Spiritual Works of Mercy
YEAR C

Sunday, February 7, 2016 * Fifth Sunday of the Year

Spiritual Work of Mercy: **Admonish the sinner**

Readings: Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8; Psalm 138; I Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11
Lectionary #75C

Sunday, March 6, 2016 * Fourth Sunday of Lent (Laetare Sunday)

Spiritual Work of Mercy: **Forgive all injustices**

Readings: Josiah 5:9a, 10-12; Psalm 34; II Corinthians 5:17-21;
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32
Lectionary #33C

Sunday, April 10, 2016 * Third Sunday of Easter

Spiritual Work of Mercy: **Instruct the Ignorant**

Readings: Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41; Psalm 30; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19
Lectionary #48C

Sunday, June 6, 2016 * Tenth Sunday of the Year

Spiritual Work of Mercy: **Comfort the sorrowful**

Readings: I Kings 17:17-24; Psalm 30; Galatians 1:11-19; Luke 7:11-17
Lectionary #90C

Sunday, August 28, 2016 * Twenty-Second Sunday of the Year

Spiritual Work of Mercy: **Bear wrongs patiently**

Readings: Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29; Psalm 68; Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24a;
Luke 14:1, 7-14
Lectionary #126C

Sunday, October 30, 2016 * Thirty-First Sunday of the Year

Spiritual Work of Mercy: **Counsel the Doubtful**

Readings: Wisdom 11:22-12:2; Psalm 145; II Thessalonians 1:11-22;
Luke 19:1-10
Lectionary #153C

Sunday, November 20, 2016 * Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Spiritual Work of Mercy: **Pray for the Living and the Dead**

Readings: II Samuel 5:1-3; Psalm 122; Colossians 1:12-20;
Luke 23:35-43
Lectionary # 162C