

Homily for Feast of Divine Mercy 2015

By Deacon Mick Irving

When I was a child about the age of 11, I went into our back yard and began rolling rocks across the yard. We had a large dog named princess who had to be one of the dumbest animals on the planet. He (yes, we named HIM princess) liked to chase rocks. I think the dog needed glasses! He couldn't tell the difference between a rock and a tennis ball. [If I recall correctly the dog was a stray we picked up and no one bothered to check to see if it was a he or she]

At any rate, I would roll a rock across the ground and Princess would run it down and bring it back to me. I knew it had to be hard on his teeth, but it was funny that the dog chased rocks. So, being rather amused, I thought that since the dog likes to chase small rocks, perhaps he would like to chase big rocks.

So, I got a rather large rock and bowled it across the yard and it skipped onto the patio and blasted a foot-sized hole right through the sliding glass door, but without shattering the entire glass door. Thankfully, the dog's vision was at least good enough for him to recognize the difference between a sliding glass door and a large rock, and so Princess skidded to a halt just before going through the door and making the hole a lot larger.

Well, I was absolutely petrified—because my father was sitting in the living room when my boulder rolled through the glass door and across the floor disrupting his viewing pleasure.

[When I told my mother a few weeks back that I would tell this story from 46 years ago, she told me she recalled the event and that she seemed to recall my father was watching Notre Dame versus USC].

At any rate, I froze in shock, knowing that within a few seconds, my dad would punish me severely. He was a large man, about six foot one and 240 pounds, boxed heavy weight in his younger days in the Army, and to an 11 year old boy who weighed 80 pounds, the thought that my father might inflict maximum punishment was frightening.

My father came to the glass door, opened it, gave me one of those looks, and just before I was about to pass out, he pointed his finger at me and said,

“Don’t make the dog chase rocks!”

He then closed the door, returned to the living room, and never mentioned it again.

What do you think? Was he just or was he merciful? Well, he was both. He could see that I was frightened, guilty, ashamed and humbled, and that I had already suffered greater punishment than he could have meted out. “Justice” had been served! I did, however, have to clean up the glass, but my father assumed the responsibility to pay for the damaged door. [Later on we will see how Christ assumed responsibility for our actions.]

Yet, he was also merciful. He knew that my actions were more ignorant than intentional. And, that is, for the most part, how God sees our actions. When the Romans [and that really means all of us] were nailing Christ to the cross, Jesus cried out “Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing.” You see, if they actually knew they were killing the Son of God, that they were cruelly killing innocence itself, that they were killing their creator, they would have separated themselves completely from God—there would have been no possibility for mercy, there would have only been justice. Likewise, if I had known what I was doing, and then I intentionally bowled the rock through the glass door, my fate would have been sealed.

This sort of judgment is reflected in the condemnation of the fallen angels. Angels are pure spirits with understanding of the consequences of their actions. Once certain angels decided to sin against God, they simultaneously decided not to repent and because of that their fates were sealed for all time. They are who we call “demons”. In the case of human beings, we develop knowledge gradually, and therefore, in many cases, we are not fully aware of the consequence of

our actions. And, we live in time, and God has graciously given us the opportunity for repentance until we die. The fallen angels were not afforded that opportunity.

In addition to not being fully aware of what we are doing, there is another condition for mercy. What was it that influenced Our Lord to *elevate an adulteress above a Pharisee, a penitent thief above a High Priest, and a prodigal son above his exemplary brother?* It was their admissions of guilt, their admissions of sin, and their acts of humility.

No one can truly be good unless he/she is humble. Humility is the recognition of truth concerning ourselves.

[This can be depicted rather clearly in the story of a young 20 year-old woman who goes to confession and says: “Father, I think I am guilty of the sin of vanity. For every time I pass a mirror or window I stop, look at myself and tell myself that I am absolutely beautiful.” The priest leans forward and says: “My dear I have good news for you—THAT is NOT a SIN. It is only a mistake!”]

Once again, humility is the recognition of truth concerning ourselves. Christ is the friend of sinners, but we must acknowledge our sins so we can ask for His mercy. Think about it, would my father have been merciful to me if I done what Adam did in the Garden – blamed Eve – if I blamed the dog for the broken glass door? Of course not!

Recall the woman caught in adultery—literally caught in the act. There was no question about her guilt when the Pharisees placed her in front of Christ. In her case, her sin was exposed for everyone to see, and the Pharisees challenged Christ to condemn her based on the Mosaic Law. If He condemned her to be stoned, He would show that He was not the merciful one He claimed to be. If He refused to condemn her, then He would have violated the Mosaic Law, and the Pharisees would have been successful in getting the people to turn against Him.

So, what did Christ do? He demonstrated to the Pharisees, the adulteress, and the crowd the condition of mercy. He began drawing on the ground with His finger to indicate, what some

theologians believe, that as the **Word** of God, **HE** is author of those stone tablets—a message that would not have been lost on the Pharisees.

An interesting side note is that the Mosaic Law was written [by the finger of God] on stone tablets, brought to the Ark of the Covenant, placed on the mercy seat and sprinkled with the innocent blood of an animal. Christ was later to bring that Law (with which the Pharisees challenged Him)—He brought it to perfection by the sprinkling of His own blood, the blood of the Lamb of God, and interpreting the Law from the seat of mercy. Our faith is so rich, isn't it?

At any rate, we return to scene with the crowd, the adulteress and the Pharisees. Christ said to the Pharisees: “He who is without sin, may cast the first stone.” Notice that He didn't condemn the Pharisees. Rather, he made them condemn themselves. For, once they condemned themselves, once they acknowledged their own guilt, only then could they be open to His mercy. After the Pharisees threw down their rocks and left, Christ turned to the woman, who had no way of hiding her guilt, and said: “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And, then Christ said: “Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.”

Since the “wages of sin is death”, why didn't the Lord condemn her? After all, she was brought before Him for judgment, and since God is the author of the Law, and is all just, and is without sin, and sin demands atonement, Why did He not condemn her? The reason He didn't condemn her [and this is very important] was because He would be condemned in her place. God is all just and sin demands atonement. Therefore, for mercy to be shown, someone must accept the consequences on behalf of the guilty. Justice was satisfied on the cross. The cross is where God's justice and God's mercy, meet.

So, the condition of mercy for the adulteress, the penitent thief on the cross, and the prodigal son were their admissions of guilt—or in other words—their humility. And, that is the condition of mercy for us as well.

And since this is Divine Mercy Sunday, I'd like to close with a few words about this great feast. The Divine Mercy devotion began spreading throughout the world in the 1930s. The message was and is a reminder of what the Church has always taught through Scripture and Tradition: that God is merciful and forgiving and that we, too, must show mercy and forgiveness.

It was between the First and Second World Wars that Christ entrusted His message of mercy to Saint Faustina, an uneducated Polish nun who, in obedience to her spiritual director, wrote a diary of about 600 pages. In her diary she recorded the revelations she received about God's mercy. How necessary His message was during those years of war, strife and suffering. Jesus told Sr Faustina:

Humanity will not find peace until it turns trustfully to divine mercy.

We should consider this message a special gift at a time in our own country where there is a serious threat to the dignity of the human person. The message of divine mercy is implicitly *a message about the value of every human being*. Because each person is precious in the eyes of God, and Christ demonstrated that when He died on the cross—when He gave his life for us.

The message of mercy is that God loves us — all of us —no matter how great our sins. He wants us to recognize that He is a greater SAVIOR than we are sinners. As Saint Francis DeSales once said:

“Where is the foolish person who would think it in his power to commit a sin more than God could forgive.”

Lord, we now turn to you in prayer full of confidence in your Divine Mercy. Let us pray:

Eternal God, in whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us and increase Your mercy in us, that in difficult moments we might not despair nor become despondent, but with great confidence submit ourselves to Your holy will, which is Love and Mercy itself.