

[Readings: Isaiah 43:16-21; Ps. 126; Phil. 3:8-14; John 8:1-11]

The theme for today's homily could be: "I Saw What You Did and I Know Who You Are!" Because all three readings today focus on our sinful past. Isaiah has been lamenting the infidelity of the people of Israel who continued to sin and turn away from the Lord and are now in exile. There seems to be no hope for those who stubbornly and deliberately refuse to turn back to the Lord and follow His commands. In spite of this, at this point in our First Reading passage, Isaiah gives a message of hope for that faithful remnant left behind in Jerusalem, in captivity in Babylon and for those who have not been faithful to God anywhere.

The key words of his message today are, "Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago, consider not." How many times do we play the same tapes over and over in our heads? You know which ones I mean. Not the ones of happier times and loving moments, but those tapes that remind us of our mistakes, our shortcomings, our sins and our weakness? Isaiah says, "He knows what you did, and He knows who you are," but then Isaiah says, "And He wants to forgive you and for you to forgive yourself."

It takes a lot of energy to harbor resentment, bitterness and regret, both against others and more importantly against ourselves. It keeps us from being healthy and whole. Isaiah says, let it go. As the Lord has forgiven you and forgotten your iniquities, so you must do for yourself and for one another.

Now, let's listen to the words of St. Paul. A fanatical Jew who took his religion VERY seriously! Serious enough that he would arbitrarily break into houses of Christian believers and have them removed, tortured and killed while he watched. Can you imagine the field day St. Paul would have if he played THOSE tapes over and over? He probably would have driven himself insane.

Instead, he says, "By the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace in me has not been in vain." God knows what we did, and God knows who we are. ***"But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace in me has not been in vain."*** I would ask that you remember these words this week. "By the grace of God, I am what I am, and God's grace in me has not been in vain."

St. Paul admits that because of his conversion, his year-long retreat with St. Peter and the other Christians, his newfound fervor in preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, all of his past life (before Christ) is loss and rubbish. The only thing that matters to him is where he is now -- in the power that comes with Jesus Christ and His Resurrection.

What else do you and I need, if we are in a right relationship with Jesus Christ? St. Paul also admits that he has not yet "attained perfect maturity." None of us can make that claim until we are six feet under, and even then, maybe not. Jesus Christ still has so much to work on in St. Paul, who says that he forgets what lies behind and strains forward to what lies ahead. This is a great philosophy of life for you and for me: forgive what lies behind and move forward.

Come to confession this Friday at 7 PM. There will be seven priests on hand to offer you God's compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation. If it has been a while since you have been to confession, consider this as my personal invitation to you to come and be reconciled with the Lord, the Church, yourself.

Then we come to that curious scene from today's Gospel. There is an old joke used in the seminary about this scene, when Jesus says, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." There is silence for a moment.

And then one solitary woman throws a stone with all her might and bops the adulterous woman square on the head. Jesus rolls his eyes and throws his arms up in the air and says, "Mother, will you PLEASE stay out of this?"

How about what happens next? Jesus starts scribbling in the soil, the dirt. What is He writing? Could it be simply, "God saw what you did!" and then after challenging those who think they are sinless, He continues writing, "And He knows who you are and where you live!"

And one by one, everyone realizes that they are NOT without sin and leave, BEGINNING WITH THE ELDERS! That was a tremendous statement made by the crowd. That those who are the most skilled in the law are the first to admit their sinfulness. That was an act of humility, humiliation and shame.

What are the compassionate words of Jesus to this woman? "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore." Stop playing the negative tapes. Start playing the positive ones. Live in the present and prepare for the future. Sinners are saints with a past; Saints are sinners with a future.

Jesus challenges her – and us – to unleash the Gospel. To proclaim how the Good News of Jesus Christ has changed our lives forever.

In today's bulletin you will find an insert from our Archbishop of Detroit, Archbishop Allen Vigneron. He is using that phrase, "Unleash the Gospel" as his rallying cry for every Catholic person in the Archdiocese of Detroit.

There are a great number of initiatives to encounter Jesus, to grow as disciples, and to give witness to His love.

We know the world is not as God wants it to be. Changes have affected not only our planet, but our society, our families and our neighbors. Even you and I have bought into the culture of death in very subtle ways with our attitudes, our words and our sinful behavior. But we have the power of the Gospel to live and to share the Good News of hope and new life. Through this we follow the wishes of our Holy Father Pope Francis to recognize what we have in knowing Jesus and in sharing Him with others.

We have prayed for a New Pentecost in the Archdiocese and the Lord has heard our prayer. There are so many ways to experience this outpouring of the Holy Spirit, to be reborn and recharged as modern disciples of Jesus Christ. You will see it on the back sheet of the Archbishop's letter. The Amazing Parishes Conference, Come, Encounter Christ, 24 Hours for the Lord, all of these are building up to and leading us to Synod 16 in the Fall, moving as a church from maintenance to Mission.

The work is hard; the laborers are few. Are you up to the challenge to encounter Jesus, to grow as His disciples, and to give witness to His love?

To Unleash the Gospel? AMEN!

Readings: Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22; Phil. 2:6-11; Luke 22:14 – 23:56]

Once upon a time, a little boy had a devastating blood disease but recovered. However, his sister was not so fortunate. She needed a transfusion and because the boy had the same rare blood type, he was asked to donate his blood to his sister. He seemed stunned, but wanted to help his sister and agreed to do so. As the process began, he smiled at his sister bravely, but by the time it was over he seemed tense and quiet. The silence was broken only when he looked up and asked, “Doctor, when am I going to die?”

He’d thought that giving his blood for his sister would mean that he was going to die. Yet even believing this he had managed to say, “Yes.” Imagine that!

Palm Sunday is more accurately called Passion Sunday. In this context, Christians often assume that “passion” is the word for the suffering and anguish of Jesus’ death. However, the word first describes something felt deeply, powerfully, almost absolutely. The story of the little boy, recounted by Robert Emerson Coleman in his book *Written in Blood*, reminds us that a person can love so passionately that she or he would be willing to give up life itself out of love for another. The solemnity of this day and the reading of the Passion of Christ means most when we realize it’s not just about the pain. It’s about the love (meditation by *Father Larry Janowski*.)

If Holy Week had ended on Good Friday, we might call it Unholy Week. It would describe only too closely the path of Isaiah’s faithful servant, who comes to rouse hearts yet endures a brutal reception as his words fall on deaf ears. Passages from prophecy and psalms like bitter Psalm 22 warn us down through the centuries that being just and innocent in no way guarantees success.

We like to think of religion as spiritual life insurance. If we walk the moral line, God will protect us from harm, keep our children safe, fend off disease, spare us evil times. But Scripture reminds us repeatedly that it doesn’t work that way. The most obedient man who ever lived was arrested, humiliated, tortured, and killed by a means that should make the delicate person look away.

If we learn anything from Passion Week, it's that being good is no inoculation against suffering. But this isn't the takeaway lesson of Holy Week. Through it all, we catch glimpses of the merciful Father in whom Jesus put the steeliest kind of trust. We see this mercy in the meal Jesus transforms from a simple supper to an everlasting promise of life. We hear the tinkling bell of hope in the assurance Jesus gives Peter that despite an initial failure to respond with courage, he'll find the grace to be strong in time.

Jesus restores the ear of His enemy's servant damaged during His arrest, as if He didn't have more pressing concerns to worry about. Though Jesus shows such attention to a servant, He ignores the powerful people who stand before Him that day: the governor from Rome and the king of Judea, either of whom could have spared Him.

Jesus consoles the mourning women, intercedes for the forgiveness of His executioners, and welcomes a repentant criminal into Paradise. The Way of the Cross, we come to recognize, is not primarily an avenue of suffering but the path of God's mercy. It is the safest journey any of us in history can take. Let us take it with Him this week (meditation by *Alice Camille*). AMEN!

[Readings: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Psalm 116; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; John 13:1-15]

A U.S. study conducted recently suggests that the phenomenon of serving bigger meal portions on bigger plates, which pushes people to overeat, has also occurred gradually. The main meal has grown by 69 per cent; plate size has increased 66 per cent and bread size by about 23 percent. This report appears in, of all things, the April, 2010 edition of *The International Journal of Obesity!* Come to think of it, even the hosts we serve at Holy Communion are larger than the smaller, thinner wafers of 50 years ago, which used to “melt in your mouth and not in your hand,” as the saying goes!

Indeed, we are more accustomed to “comfort eating” than our parents, grandparents and ancestors. Trying to find comfort in something that gives only temporary pleasure. Trying to find our fulfillment in things that fill the stomach.

The love we receive at this Eucharist through the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, is a different kind of feeding, a different kind of food. The Eucharist makes present to us the whole of the saving work of Jesus. We remember and celebrate everything that Jesus did, taught and suffered for our salvation, until He comes again in glory. His self-giving at the Last Supper was an act that looks backward and forward.

His self-giving looks ahead to Good Friday, when it would be completed by His sacrificial death on the cross. By giving us the Eucharist, Jesus anticipates His self-offering even unto death on the cross, His final act of complete obedience to the Father, made for love of us.

It was love for us that led the Son of God to share our life in the Incarnation – the Word Made Flesh. It was love for us that led Him to destroy our sin and death in the Crucifixion. It is that love that is Christ’s farewell and eternal gift to us in the Eucharist. But that love we receive at this table is not only for us gathered here. Our communion in the Body and Blood of Christ requires us to serve others as He did – throughout life, even unto death. As we receive Christ’s gift of love, we are to proclaim His death by becoming one with Him in His sacrifice.

We do this tonight with the symbolic washing of feet. We do it when we leave here with the choices to respond to others in need. "As I have done for you, so you must do for others." Jesus washing the feet of the apostles teaches us about power and humility. We can never say that we are too good for any act of service to another person. Nothing falls beneath our dignity. No act becomes too unimportant for us to worry about. Nothing is a waste of our talents. Jesus lays claim on us. That claim is to offer the washing of forgiveness, helping people find the refreshment of release from guilt. We offer the washing of service, cleaning off the dirt of poverty, hunger, suffering, violence, hopelessness and despair.

The Last Supper was the most intimate moment in the life of Jesus. It is the most intimate moment in the life of His Church. This is the night when people who are personally close to Jesus know that He does not want to eat alone. Tonight, of all nights, He wants someone to talk to, someone to be with.

When He gathers His friends into a safe circle of concern, He washes their feet. As a kindness, because they are tired; as a courtesy, because He is their host; as a sign that in the long run, service to them is more to the point than teaching or leading or saving them.

Then He gives them His peace. As a kindness, because they are afraid of the future; as a courtesy, because they are ill at ease; as a sign that physical chaos, psychological insecurity or spiritual turmoil need not override the balm of His presence.

Then He gives them bread and wine. As a kindness, because they are hungry; as a courtesy, because it brought them together; as a sign of His Body and Blood, and a promise that whoever lived in His memory would never die. Tonight, Jesus invites us to His supper. He will serve us, extend His peace to us, and give us His Body and Blood. As a kindness, because we desperately need His peace; as a courtesy, because we are His awkward servants; as a sign, because we need to clean ourselves and each other. AMEN!

[Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12; Psalm 31; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42]

In the English-speaking world, this day is known as Good Friday. It seems a strange designation, doesn't it? As I listen to the morning news on the clock radio as I prepare to meet my morning, I smile whenever that morning is a Friday morning, because the radio personality sings in a cheerful voice: "Good Friday morning to you!" She says this fifty-two Fridays a year. What she doesn't know is that whenever she says that, I think of Good Friday – today.

In Sweden, this day is "Long Friday." It recalls the long hours of the suffering of Jesus Christ and His agony on the Cross. In Polish, it is "Wielki Piątek," Great Friday. Before the secular culture and political correctness took over so many Western countries, all schools, businesses and federal, state and municipal activities came to a grinding halt between the hours of 12 Noon and 3 PM. In old Russia, churches and public buildings were draped in black as a sign of mourning for the world's true King.

But, St. John's passion narrative, which we have just heard proclaimed in a beautiful way, is not an account of a mournful death march across the way of sorrows. Rather, it is a royal procession to the cross, the Lord's throne of glory. John does not dwell on the pain and suffering of Jesus. Rather, John presents, as the scripture scholar Raymond Brown says, "the passion of a sovereign king who has overcome the world." Such a victor does not need our sympathy or our tears. Rather, we are called to celebrate our sharing in the full paschal mystery of the Lord's death and Resurrection.

We experience this day as "good" because we are the beneficiaries, the heirs, of Jesus' glorification on the cross. John the evangelist invites us to view the death of Jesus not from a human perspective, but from GOD'S perspective. The infinite goodness and love found there are revealed to us most clearly in the death of Jesus, His last and greatest work for the Father's glory. God so loved the world that the Friday on which the Son of God died for our salvation became Good Friday, the BEST Friday!

Our Second Reading reminds us that we share in the saving Passover of Jesus from death to life, from sin to salvation, from sickness to healing. We are told that Jesus empathizes with us. He is no stranger to weakness and temptation and daily tests. We can confidently approach the throne of grace, the Holy Cross, to receive mercy and grace. From His throne on the cross, and now from His throne in Heaven, Jesus offers prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the Father Who raised Him up from death. He gives us the present hope of future glory.

This is the message of Good Friday. Whatever crosses we bear we do not bear alone. Whether that cross is the cross of physical, mental, emotional or spiritual distress. Whether that cross is one of rejection, isolation, loss of a loved one, or loneliness. Whether that cross is one of doubt, anxiety, pain or fear.

Whether that cross is one of abuse, abandonment or addiction. Take up that cross. Die on that cross. Be consumed by that cross. And let that cross bring you closer to the crucified Christ.

Bring that cross to the wood of the cross which we will adore in a few moments. Nail your cross to the Holy Cross of Jesus Christ. Make it redemptive. Give it meaning.

And as you enter that dark and warm sacred place where you are totally alone with God, let God say a sacred and personal Word to you. And let your Jesus walk with you from that cross to the tomb and to the Resurrection we will celebrate on Sunday.

We adore You O Christ, and we bless You,
Because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world! AMEN!

[Readings: Gn 1:1-2:2; Ex 14:15-15:1, Is 54:5-14; Rom 6:3-1; Lk: 24:1-12]

Last Thursday evening, we concluded our forty-day journey through Lent. If we were faithful to the discipline of Lent, we are probably a little thinner, a little poorer in the wallet, and a little richer in spirit. As we journeyed through this Holy Week, we were reminded of our connection to that first Holy Week. Tonight we stand at the empty tomb, like a butterfly getting ready to emerge from its cocoon.

We heard the stories of struggle and obstacles. The struggle of creation breaking forth out of nothing; the struggle of an enslaved people given their freedom; the struggle of those who are thirsty for fulfillment and who come to the Lord in their poverty. The struggle of God's Word being sent down from the heavens and not returning until it has achieved its purpose. The struggle of Jesus Himself through the death of sin and decay to the life of Resurrection.

Our catechumens, now called the elect, and our candidates for ongoing conversion stand at the edge of tomb, ready for transformation. So do all of us.

You see, you and I are spiritual butterflies. Some of us are still nestled safe, secure and small in a cocoon which may be too hard for us to crack open. There are monsters under our bed, skeletons in our closets and secrets in our hearts that we still have not brought forth and allowed into the light of the Risen Christ. We are afraid, terrified, of some public or private demon, some fear that still terrorizes us. The fear that I will run out of time, that I will never be loved genuinely by anyone, that I will be hurt again, that what I believe and trust most will leave me shattered.

And yet, if we are willing to face our fears -- sometimes with the help of an angel -- we can break the shackles of the fears that enslave us and discover a newness in our lives. We might be like that butterfly -- struggling to find our new selves in Christ, but only with a little "window of opportunity" to help us.

Or, God bless us, we might be that fully-emerging new creation we celebrate tonight. Our "old selves" buried in the waters of baptism and our "new selves" emerging healthy, whole and holy! What a grace that would be!

Once upon a time, a teacher asked her second grade class what each wanted to be. After all the usual professions were shouted out, little Timmy said, "I want to be possible." The teacher asked, "What do you mean, possible?" And little Timmy responded: "Well, my mom is always telling me that I'm impossible. So when I get big, I want to be possible!"

My friends, Easter is a time of possibilities. In his rising from the dead, Christ enables us to make possible in our own lives all that he taught and lived throughout his brief life among us. The empty tomb is a sign of perfect hope -- that in Christ, all things are possible. Our story and our lives do not end at the grave, sealed in a tomb blackened by darkness and sin. Our story and our lives continue. We become the angels -- the messengers -- of the Resurrection in every act of kindness, compassion and forgiveness extended to us and which we, in turn, extend to others.

The fluid of Christ's Body and Blood which we receive in this Eucharist gives strength to our wings and enable us to soar to new heights. The power of the Holy Spirit outpoured in the Sacrament of Confirmation gives us the wisdom, the courage, the right judgment and the holiness to walk with angels. The best is yet to be!

It is all here -- the promises of God and the legacy of hope even as we live in a world often seemingly without hope. So many stories. So many flourishes of promise. So many anxious hearts waiting to hear Good News.

The Risen Jesus quiets those fears. Darkness yields to dawn. Now there is life where there was death. It's all about the goodness and the rawness of life. We began this Vigil in darkness. Then we proceeded in light. We were or will be born into a new creation through water and anointed and confirmed in the faith by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. We peer into the tomb to find only wrapping clothes. Shrouds, once symbols of death, now laid carefully aside, become new symbols of life. You, dear elect and candidates, do not run away from what is given to you tonight!

Continuing the tradition of giving you a present for coming to church at Easter and at Christmas, we are happy to present you with Matthew Kelly's book *"Beautiful Mercy: Experiencing God's Unconditional Love So We Can Share It with Others."* It is a compendium of reflections based on the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, which our Holy Father Pope Francis has asked us to focus upon during this Jubilee Year of Mercy. We are scheduling a book club discussion session for next month. Check out our website and our bulletin for more information. Take gentle care of yourself this Easter.

Thumb through the book and let the Holy Spirit stop you on the right pages. Walk out of your cave, stretch out your tired and weakened spiritual muscles and take a deep breath of fresh Holy Spirit air. There IS reason to hope and to celebrate a Happy Easter! THAT is worth celebrating and calling it Resurrection Sunday. And then, healed, raised and cleaned off, we can become the Divine Word News Service, and share that Good News with those who need to hear it. "Tell us, what did you see?" "Let me tell you!"

We pray this evening for your prayers so that they may be the catalyst for those here present who are still stuck in their tombs. We pray that one day all of us can move from the darkness of death and the tomb into the Easter light of Resurrection glory and new life. Let us make our prayer the one from the book "Rediscover Jesus" and pray that with the Easter gift of today 's Easter book by Matthew Kelly, we may experience in all ways and always, the beautiful and transforming gift of God's beautiful mercy:

Loving Father, here I am. I trust that You have an incredible plan for me.

Transform me. Transform my life. Everything is on the table.

Take what You want to take and give what you want to give.

Transform me into the person You created me to be,

so I can Live the life You envision for me.

I hold nothing back; I am 100 percent available. How can I help?

Alleluia! And AMEN!

[Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Psalm 118; Col 3:1-4 or 1 Cor. 5:6b-8; John 20:1-9]

When I do my annual spiritual retreat, if all of the retreat houses are full, as a second option, I stay in a hotel or motel for a week in the Metro Detroit area. I book a room for five nights. One year, the front desk receptionist mis-entered my registration. The first morning, I left my room for breakfast, spent most of the day reading, praying, walking and reflecting at a nearby park which borders a lake. At the end of the day, I returned to my room and found it empty of all my personal possessions: my clothing, my toiletries, my medicine.

I double-checked the room number. It was the right room. I felt stunned, paralyzed and violated. I went to the office to see what had happened. Turns out, the receptionist had only registered me for one day, not for one week. She reprogrammed my room key, and there, next to the registration desk was my suitcase. Funny thing, though, when I went to return to my room and unpack everything, housekeeping forgot to empty the dresser drawers. They sat, neat as a pin, all of my t-shirts, shorts and socks. My empty room wasn't totally empty.

What do YOU find when you look into the empty tomb of Easter? What is there? Shock, despair, or outrage are all typical responses to an empty room -- or to an empty tomb. Standing within the emptiness, we realize how full our lives were and how great is our loss. But our loss also makes us acutely aware that our most precious asset -- love -- is always with us. Do you look into the tomb and find your faith? That is the Good News of Easter. That is what we celebrate today.

Years back, while I was still in the seminary, I had the blessing of going on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I saw a famous tomb of the Resurrection of the Lord. The experience itself was one of the most mercenary experiences of my life, and was a totally unholy experience. That is for another homily and another time. But I did take from the tomb the message found at the entrance: "He is not here." That simple sentence had more than one profound meaning to it!

“He is not here.” Mary Magdalene puts it another way: “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Mary Magdalene was the first to find Christ’s empty grave. Though she mistakenly thought at first that others had robbed the tomb, her question was important: Where had Jesus gone? It seems He chose to walk the earth again for a while before ascending to the right hand of God.

And -- let’s hope -- Jesus Christ continues to walk in each of our lives. Easter Day begins an octave, eight days that remind us that every day is Easter and that we are a people of the Resurrection who believe in love, joy, forgiveness, and life in all forms -- including the eternal variety. Show that you believe in what the risen Christ stands for by doling out love, mercy, and kindness in generous portions these eight days and beyond.

The word Easter literally means “the feast of fresh flowers”. It reminds us that everything is new; that Jesus has risen. In this weekend’s first reading from Acts of the Apostles, St. Peter shares his experience with the Risen Christ. He ate and drank with Him after Jesus rose from the dead. Peter invites us to bear witness to Jesus by our exemplary lives.

In the second reading, St. Paul shares his encounter with the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus. This is where St. Paul experiences the power of the risen Lord which initiated St. Paul for his own conversion.

In today’s Gospel, the Risen Lord reveals His glory first to an ordinary woman. She was blessed to become the first evangelizer of the Risen Lord.

The Risen Lord sends Mary to evangelize His Apostles. Mary proclaims her personal experience, “I have seen The Lord!” Have YOU seen the Lord?

What’s still in YOUR tomb? Are you still in it? Our dishonesty. Our hypocrisy. Our pettiness. Our selfishness. Our resentment. Our traumatic memories. Our unemployment. Our grudges. Our poisoned relationships. Our pessimism and gloomy despair. When I put it that way, the cave isn’t very empty, is it? What IS in your cave?

Now chew on this: Because Jesus has nailed all of our sins on the cross with Him, because Jesus is buried with our sins – no matter how great or how small – because Jesus has triumphed over sin and death, and illness and disease and pain, we can leave all of that ugly stuff in the tomb, and roll the stone across the entrance. ALLELUIA!

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us the power to do this. We can even leave in the cave the greatest of all fears – the fear of death itself.

The message of Easter is that nothing can destroy us, our pain, suffering, and even death. Because Christ has conquered all these, we too can conquer all these if we commit ourselves to Jesus Christ, if we unleash the Gospel, and if we spread God's beautiful mercy to others.

As painful as the story of our Good Fridays is, in the end love has the final word -- a word so powerful as to transform the world. How might we turn anew to this word when insecurity, anger, or fear may tempt us to be less compassionate and caring toward others? During Holy Week and throughout the year, how can we embrace love and help transform the world? Easter gives us a joyous message that we are people of Resurrection. We cannot stay in our tomb of sins. For Christians, Easter means that no tomb can hold us back. Instead, we live joyfully with the Resurrected Lord, in all the events of our lives.

We do not need to live in the darkness of our personal caves any longer. As Jesus shouted to the dead Lazarus in HIS cave: COME OUT! And as Jesus says to the people near Lazarus, who is wrapped in the burial tapes and cloths, "Untie him and let him go free." Those just might be the words we need to hear today. To come out of our caves. To be untied and set free. The essence of Easter is transformation. Before a baby chick becomes a viable life, it strengthens itself by pushing through the eggshell. We know that a beautiful butterfly was not always beautiful. A transformation is needed and occurs. We deal with many people who long to transform their lives into something better.

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“Beautiful Mercy: Experiencing God’s Unconditional Love So We Can Share It with Others.” It is a compendium of reflections based on the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, which our Holy Father Pope Francis has asked us to focus upon during this Jubilee Year of Mercy. We are scheduling a book club discussion session for next month. Check out our website and our bulletin for more information. Take gentle care of yourself this Easter.

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I hold nothing back; I am 100 percent available. How can I help?

Alleluia! and AMEN!

[Readings: Acts 5:12-16; Ps. 118; Rev. 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19; John 20:19-31]

Today, the Second Sunday of Easter, is now known as Divine Mercy Sunday. For those of you who do not know, the history of the image of the Divine Mercy goes back to the year 1931, when Christ directed Sr. St. Mary Faustina Kowalska to have the Divine Mercy image painted, a project she undertook with the assistance of her spiritual director and an artist. The image took six months to complete, with St. Faustina insisting many changes be made along the way. Yet despite the effort, St. Faustina was disappointed with the result, as it didn't reflect the magnificence of her vision. When Sister Faustina looked at it, she started to cry. "Well, the best we can do is this. There you go. It's impossible. Our paints and our techniques don't allow for more." This is the image you see here in this sanctuary, brought over here by Fr. Roman.

In the year 2000, Pope St. John Paul II opened up the new millennium by pointing us to mercy. The first saint canonized in the new millennium was Sr. Faustina, and Divine Mercy Sunday was established. As the Catholic media reports about this feast, one line continues to be repeated: "The human heart will not know peace until it comes to the Divine Mercy of God." This motto has been the hallmark of the 600-page diary of Sr. Mary Faustina Kowalska, the one to whom Jesus revealed Himself in a personal and intimate way over fourteen apparitions in the early part of the twentieth century.

The message of Jesus to St. Faustina was not a new revelation, but a reminder of those timeless truths about God's merciful love for all humankind and His desire for us to turn to Him with trust. Hence the words at the bottom of the painting of the Divine Mercy: "Jesus I trust in You."

Over the years, I have become so moved by this reality, that after I receive Holy Communion, I silently pray the words inscribed at the base of my chalice, words from Jesus and from a Marian hymn: *Jestem przy tobie pamietam, czuwam.* I am with you. I remember. I stand vigilant. And, *Jezu, Ufam Tobie!* Jesus, I trust in You!

The image of Jesus in the Divine Mercy painting is the one taken from today's Gospel. Behind Him is the locked door. He points to His Sacred Heart with one hand, a pale and red ray emanating from Him which recalls the blood and water that flowed from His pierced side as He hung on the Cross.

The other hand is raised in blessing, as He says the words we hear from John: "Peace be with you." As the Divine Word blew the Holy Spirit over the waters of Creation, Jesus breathes on His Church with words of merciful forgiveness and compassion. He teaches us that doubt cannot be a stopping place, but a stepping stone to greater faith.

On another occasion, Our Lord revealed that 3 PM was the Hour of Divine Mercy, because it was at that moment that He died on the Cross.

The Feast of Divine Mercy is a celebration and summation of God's merciful love as seen throughout the history of our salvation from the days of Adam to its completion in Jesus Christ. Even now mercy is active in every heart that finds forgiveness of sins. The feast is also a Day of Atonement, like Yom Kippur, when all sins and punishment are washed away in His infinite mercy. It is also a feast of the Covenant of Mercy, celebrated on the eighth day of Easter, reaffirming our baptism in the precious blood and water from His wounded side.

I confess, I was not too enthused when Pope St. John Paul II chose the days he did for the Divine Mercy Novena and Divine Mercy Sunday. Start a novena on Good Friday? Overshadow the powerful Gospel for today's Easter Sunday for the sake of a pious devotional practice?

Then I prayed what I usually pray when I don't understand: Lord, let me do Your will. Show me Your will. Help me to understand Your will. And God did!

Then the insights came. As I said earlier, the rays emanating from the heart of the Divine Mercy is like the blood and water flowing from the side of the crucified Christ on Good Friday. He gave up His life for us out of loving mercy. The Second Sunday of Easter focusses on the awesome gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation: whose sins you forgive are forgive them. I know the sweet mercy of Jesus when I go to confession.

To have the grace as a priest to hear confessions and to reconcile people to God, to the Church and to themselves is one of the two greatest highlights of my priesthood. I cherish the hours I spend in the confessional/reconciliation room. As a pastoral note on this feast day, many want to receive the plenary indulgence which stipulates that you should go to confession and receive Eucharist as part of the indulgence.

It does not state that you must go to confession on the day of the feast. The Church allows 20 days before or after the feast of Divine Mercy to go to confession and to receive the indulgence. If you have completed your Easter duty, if you have already been to confession for Easter, then that suffices.

The readings this week remind listeners that the Easter season is about both celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus and doing something about it: They are full of messages about call, sending, mission. The “E” word that no Catholic likes to hear: Evangelization.

How do you testify to the presence of the risen Christ in your life?

How do you love as God wants you to love?

How do you spread God’s justice, peace and merciful forgiveness?

What are some ways we can lead others to the path of the Father, the path of Divine Mercy? The purpose of presenting Christ is to show the world that Jesus loves them and is knocking at their door. Here are some concrete ways we can present God’s mercy in this jubilee year of Mercy.

1. You’re sitting near a stranger on a park bench. They look down-and out. The evangelizer, through spiritual love for their brother or sister, gently asks with genuine concern “Are you OK? I don’t mean to intrude but I couldn’t help but notice that you seem very sad.” A conversation begins. You learn a little about the person. Later in the conversation you mention something from the Gospel that relates to their situation. You wait for their reaction – for the opportunity to expand the conversation of the Gospel.

Ask them if they would like you to pray for or with them. This is the most powerful way to reach someone’s soul and almost never fails, given the chance.

2.. You're with your 24-year-old daughter or granddaughter and her friends. The discussion is about life-changing events. Wait for the opportunity and tell your story about how Jesus changed your life.

Can you identify the precise moment when you realized that Jesus is for real, the Church is for real, and you make a commitment to grow in faith? I was a sophomore at Kettering High School in Detroit. I was walking toward the bus to head home. I was drop-kicked from behind. I fell to the ground, scraped open all of my knuckles and whispered, "God help me." I realized that if I wanted God to help me, I would have to meet Him halfway. That was the start of my reversion. Start off with a few short sentences and evaluate their reactions. If the chance allows, expand your story. Stories are very powerful. Jesus told them all the time. He called them parables.

3. Start a conversation by telling a co-worker about a religious movie you saw, a book you read, or a Church event you recently attended. When expressed with spiritual joy and excitement, this attracts the listener to hear more. Look for the opportunity to begin a conversation about Jesus. "Have you seen any good movies lately?" I saw *Miracles from Heaven* last week. I don't cry much, but by the end of that movie, I cried three times. A powerful message of God's care for us and surrounding us with angels to help us. Go see it!

4. Invite someone to Mass or to an event at church. They might simply say no thanks, quickly closing the door on the conversation. Other possible responses might be: a smile and no thanks, or no I don't go to Church, ah – I don't think I belong in a Church, or I've never gone to church. Now you humbly and inquisitively respond with "why not?" What an opportunity for a deep conversation!

These are just a few examples of intentionally presenting Jesus and setting up the opportunity for the receiver to open the door to their upper room of fear and confinement just a little. This is intentional living for Christ.

This is evangelization in its simplest forms. This is showing Divine Mercy in our everyday lives. The evangelizer – that's you and me -- awakens each day ready to do God's work.

Each day begins with a prayer. Maybe something like:

Lord, fill me this day with the Holy Spirit so that I may do your will.

Help me to see who will need your Divine Mercy today.

Give me the words to speak to them and the love to share with them.

Jesus, I trust in you. AMEN!

[Readings: Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41; Psalm 30; Rev. 5:11-14; John 21:1-19]

“Follow me. These are the first words the disciples of Jesus ever heard Him address to them. They’re also the last two words of today’s Gospel. But so much has happened since the first time those words were spoken to Peter and the others!

At the shore of Galilee, “follow me” must have sounded like a lark, a young man’s game, an adventure with all sorts of wonderful possible outcomes. This teacher might become famous, and they would have been the first graduates of His school. This preacher might wind up being a great leader, and they could assume powerful positions in His coming regime. This healer might be a holy person in God’s plan, and who doesn’t want to be at the side of the next Moses?

At the very least, it all beat normal life as a fisherman and family man by a nautical mile. So why not follow, and see where it leads? That was 20 chapters, three years, a legend ago. Before miracles that rocked the senses; deep clashes with powerful authorities; terrible signs that made lips quiver and legs wobble. It was before the supper, the arrest, the trial, the cross. Before horrible days and nights spent in hiding. Before the dawn of Easter, whispers of an empty tomb, and the searing ache of hope.

“Follow me” didn’t sound so innocent now. It wasn’t a game, no mere adventure. It was for keeps. And it would cost everything they had to give. “Follow me” had a very different ring to it, now that they’d seen Jesus hauled away, saw Him beaten and abused, saw the lifeless body and gaping wounds. Once you’ve stood at the tomb, walking in the footsteps of Jesus doesn’t sound like a stroll along a sandy beach. Even with the full knowledge of Easter under your belt, you couldn’t fall in step behind this man with the same jaunty air.

Jesus asks Peter for his love three times. But not just words of love: Jesus asks for a devotion that translates into specific deeds of leadership, service, and care. He asks for the absolute surrender Peter thought he was giving the first time -- before he read the fine print on the contract.

Now when Peter answers, his response will be more meaningful. Not unlike the renewal of vows taken by couples married for 25 years, or 50. The first exchange was mostly bravado and romance: of course, together forever, you and me! When two people say those words to each other after a quarter century or more, “forever” is better perceived, and “together” is more clearly defined. So do the words, “in good times and in bad.” If Jesus asks us to follow today, after all this time, how many would get up right now and do it?

When Jesus asks Simon Peter three times, “Do you love me?” You have to know Greek to really understand what is happening here. I don’t know much Greek, so I will paraphrase in English:

“Simon, do you love Me with God’s kind of love?” “Yes, indeed, most certainly, Lord. I love you with a friendship kind of love.” “Simon, do you love Me with God’s kind of love?” “Yes, indeed, most certainly Lord. I love you like a friend.” “Simon, do you love Me with a friendship kind of love?”

“Lord, you know all things; you know I love you as a friend.”

Listen to what happens here. Jesus comes down to Peter’s level. Jesus does know all things. He knows that Peter is not yet able to honestly say, “Lord, I am capable now of loving You as fully and as totally as You love me.” So Jesus takes what Peter is able to give. He accommodates Himself to Peter’s ability and capacity to love. Jesus comes down to us to raise us up with Him.

Where are YOU in your capacity to love? Is it a distant respect but still a basic distrust of anyone but you? That’s where the captain and the soldiers and the Sanhedrin are in today’s First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles. They feel that by keeping the Law, and by staying close to the Letter of the Law, they are obeying “God rather than men.” But Peter and the Apostles say and think the same way. They think that THEY are obeying God and not men. That’s how wars and misunderstandings start. We both think that God is on OUR side, when, as Abraham Lincoln said so clearly during the War Between the States, the Civil War: “let us pray that we are on GOD’S side.”

Missing from this passage are the verses where Peter and the Apostles are actually clubbed to within an inch of their lives in prison. And what is their response? “They left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the Name” of Jesus Christ.

Peter eventually will suffer the same cruel death that Jesus Christ did. He is crucified. But in his last act of humility, Peter asks to be crucified upside down. He does not think he is worthy to be crucified in the same way as his Lord.

Let the words of this morning’s Gospel inform us and unsettle us:

“Amen, amen I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” He said this signifying by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. And when Jesus had said this, He said to Peter, “Follow me.”

Jesus asks you today: Do you love me? Do you love me with the love God has for you? Do you love me as a friend? Will YOU follow me?

Think about your answer this week. ALLELUIA. AMEN!

[Readings: Acts 13:14, 43-52; Psalm 100; Rev. 7:9, 14b-17; John 10:27-30]

May and June are the months of ordinations and anniversary of ordinations. At the anniversary Mass of a priest's ordination, the homilist said something surprising: "The mystery of the Christian priesthood is this: A priest is a fallible, ordinary man. A man of dust who remembers he will return to dust, even though he presently wears a chasuble."

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, as we observe the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, it's appropriate for us to consider the nature of authentic vocation. The word itself means "calling." We hear that we're all called by God -- all of us, not just priests and religious. But what does it mean to be called? How should we listen for it, and what are we to do about it?

Jesus says His sheep recognize His voice, and because they do, they follow where He leads. Evidently, "call" involves more than a word spoken or message received. It also implies a word *heeded*. The way we respond is not merely to hear the call but to reply with our behavior. We *follow*, as we heard last in last Sunday's Gospel. This response requires our consent.

Consent isn't an item we can hand off once and be done with it. It's never so easy, even when it comes to perpetual vows like marriage, consecrated life or ordination, or the pledge of a parent to a child. Consent involves the little-by-little, day-by-day surrender of the will to a particular purpose.

Consent means "to feel with." And feelings can change, especially if we allow the incidentals of life to distract us from our purpose. If we intend to "feel with" our primary relationships, then we have to stay close to them, attend to them daily, heed the voice of those whose claim on us is already established. We do this, mindful that we are fallible and ordinary.

We're dust, no matter what noble garments we may wear on the outside. We may be a priest, sister, brother, wife, husband, father, mother, sibling. Our commitments may not be recognized by any formal sacrament but still very real: like the artist pledged to create, the scientist to explore, the nurse to heal, the business owner to treat employees and customers justly the student who learns.

Three groups interact in our First Reading this weekend: the disciples who proclaim Christ boldly, the Gentiles who receive the message with joy; and the Jewish leaders who react with jealousy and anger. Today, the Church needs men and women who will enthusiastically proclaim Jesus to a hungry world, despite public derision, persecution and rejection. We need “good shepherds” to be “instruments of salvation.”

In our Second Reading, we see that every vocation has Heaven as its ultimate goal, and is also ordered toward bringing other people to Heaven. Ask yourselves: when you stand before the throne of God, whom will you have helped attain Heaven?” Who is in Heaven now because of YOUR example and YOUR witness?

Finally, in our Gospel, we learn that those who hear Jesus and follow Him can take comfort in His protection, for “no one can take them out of the Father’s hand.” If you are struggling to discern your vocation, or to live out your vocation, trust in the mercy of the Good Shepherd. One study suggests that young people in the seventh grade and in the eleventh grade have chosen their vocation. Listen carefully to the Good Shepherd’s voice by prayer, by reading Scripture, by seeking the sacraments, and by serving those in need. If you come to Mass every Sunday, you are ready for the next level of closeness to the Lord. Consider becoming a liturgical minister and draw closer to the Lord at Mass.

We give consent to our vocation not just once, in the hour the sacrament is conferred or our profession is engaged, but in every fresh transaction, at every bedside we tend, with every brush stroke, in every human encounter. When we link our destiny to Jesus -- and Baptism so links us all -- we’re also linked to His Father, since as Jesus says, “The Father and I are one.” Jesus gives total and profound consent to His Father, and we dare to surrender our consent to Jesus -- fallible and ordinary as we are, dust though we may be. For our vocation is the door; and our consent to that vocation is the key that opens it. ALLELUIA and AMEN!

[Readings: Acts 14:21-27; Psalm 145; Rev. 21:1-5a; John 13:31-33a, 34-35]

We have many funerals here at St. Martin de Porres. And as part of our celebration of the life of the deceased and the renewal of our own faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we invite the family of the deceased to select the readings and funeral music for the day of the Mass of the Resurrection.

Ironically, many of the readings that we hear during these Easter Sundays are readings that appear in the Funeral Mass book of readings. Today, two of the three readings are such readings. But they apply not to a dead person but to a community on the decline. They apply not to a loved one who is about to be buried, but to a church community that is about to be risen from the dead. Listen.

From today's First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles: "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God." In order for us to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ and with the Church He founded, we need to change -- we need to encounter Jesus Christ, we need to grow in His Holy Spirit, and we need to witness our faith to others.

For decades, I always thought that the hardest thing for me to do in life is change. To change my way of thinking. To change my way of living. To change my way of relating to others. But do you know what we hate more than change? You and I hate the time and energy needed during the transition!

We have to move into a new house. I don't mind that we are going to be living in a new house. It's the sorting, the packing, the recycling, and the travel back and forth several times that I hate. You, too? I have been transferred to a new job, or I am recently retired. I don't mind the new job, I am grateful to be able to afford to retire. But I hate the transition of having to learn a new routine, having to learn and remember a whole slew of new names, and, if I am retired now, having to see and to be with my spouse 24/7! You too?

Yet if, with the grace of God, we are successful in the transition, then the spirit of today's Second Reading from the Book of Revelation takes root. We will see a new heaven and a new earth. The old life is gone and a new life is embraced. Tears are wiped away. God is with us forever, making all things new!

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus says to His followers, “Come and see, come follow me.” As He leaves this earth for eternity, He says, “Go and make disciples.” Today, He says, “Love one another.” That is the essential job description of the authentic Christian disciple. Follow. Love. Go and make.

This was the spirit of the Synod that took place in the Archdiocese of Detroit back in 1969, five years after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council in Rome. I know most of you here were not born yet in 1969...

The Holy Spirit inspired Church leadership and their advisors to write some of the most thoughtful, compassionate and inspiring teachings in our history as a Church. The Second Vatican Council breathes new life into the Church; Synod '69 in Detroit put flesh and bones on it.

Archbishop Vigneron is calling every Catholic in every parish to move from a mindset of maintenance to a spirit of mission. To breathe new life into the tired old bones of our parishes. To “Unleash the Gospel” in the Archdiocese of Detroit.

Last week, five of us from St. Martin de Porres Parish joined over 1,100 people from 220 parishes in the Archdiocese and beyond to attend the Amazing Parish Conference. It took place at the Marriott Hotel located at the Renaissance Center in downtown Detroit on the shores of the Detroit River.

Beginning with an inspiring and humorous opening statement by Archbishop Vigneron, nationally-known speakers lead us in a discussion about planning the Vision of the Parish, the Sunday Experience at Mass, Evangelization, Discipleship and Stewardship, and effective Parish Leadership. Many practical helps and guides which we will reflect upon as a staff and a parish.

The next step of our preparation for the November Synod '16 is this coming Saturday. Every parish in the Archdiocese is scheduling a “parish dialogue session.” We will reflect upon and answer the questions you will find in my column in today’s bulletin. Our gathering will be at high noon on Saturday. If you want to deepen your spirituality, if you want to be nourished by God’s Word, if you want to have a part in reenergizing your parish, take the risk, take the plunge, and dare to join us. The health of your soul may depend on it! AMEN!