

Human beings are inherently or naturally forgetful. Pride rejects this observation, but the Bible - and indeed the entire liturgy of Mass - recognises that we need reminding of two things over and over again: God's love and mercy **and** the way God commands us to live.

Remember, says that writer of the first reading, that our lives are finite. **Remember** that the commandments are a gift from God. **Remember** to practice mercy if you expect to receive mercy.

The help we asked for in the opening prayer is not inconsequential. We asked God to *"look upon us... and that we may **feel** the working of your mercy, grant that we may serve you with all our heart."* And so, here's the crux of my entire homily today: God's mercy is something we can experience in deeply human ways – something we can feel – but receiving that mercy calls for a response from us: we must become willing to forgive others, and even ourselves.

Allow me to ask **you** a couple of questions: Who is the person with whom you do not have peace **right now**? Which person's name popped into your head? Are you ready to consider that perhaps God has brought this person's name to mind for a reason? This is often how Jesus speaks to us. We ask the right question and Jesus answers. Luke Chapter 1:79 says that *"He will guide us into the way of peace."* Now, the beautiful irony here is that in John chapter 14:6, Jesus names himself as "the Way," and so unless we **practice** peace, love and mercy, we're resisting the very **way** in which God is trying to lead us. Because Jesus doesn't simply show us the way to peace – **he is the Way**.

In my research for this homily, I came across a helpful quote from the British actor, Sir Peter Ustinov, who said that *"Love is an act of*

endless forgiveness, a tender look which becomes a habit." I.e. if we don't, or even refuse, to **practice** love, then we'll not be able to freely choose it... and in the end, our resistance or refusal will be the very thing which prevents us choosing Heaven.

C.S. Lewis makes a similar point when he writes that if we insist on keeping Hell, we shall not see Heaven. And perhaps that's what unforgiveness can become: a little piece of Hell that we refuse to surrender to God. Because, as Lewis also says, *"There are ultimately two kinds of people: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those **to whom** God says, "Thy will be done."*

See, there's often a tension between what we faithfully believe and what we experience. Feeling the working of God's mercy is to **know** – (heart knowledge), not just **know** in our heads - that we've been forgiven; this heart knowledge is the very thing which frees us to act differently. *"Let your behaviour change,"* Paul said in the second reading two weeks ago, *"modelled by your new mind."* I.e. those who **feel** the working of God's mercy begin acting differently. To use a negative example, the wicked servant in today's Gospel has clearly **not** experienced a mercy which affects his behaviour towards his fellow servant.

Is this a chicken or egg situation? I'd suggest **not** – because both the Opening Prayer and today's readings clearly spell the order: *"Forgive your neighbour the hurt he [or she] does you **and when** you pray, your sins will be forgiven."* Again, as Jesus Himself says in Mt 5:23-24, *"If you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother [or sister] has something against you, leave your offering*

*there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother [or sister] first, and **then** come back and present your offering.*" It couldn't be clearer: Jesus tells us how to act **so that** we may feel the working of God's mercy – but are we open to being directed by the Lord in our actions and decisions? Are we open to serving Him with all our heart, or just some of it?

I'd like to conclude by telling you about ***how I felt*** the working of God's mercy about 5 months ago. I'd been struggling with something sinful that ***I'd*** chosen. It wasn't something I'd said or done to another person, but I knew I needed to forgive myself – which I was trying to do – and I also greatly desired God's mercy. I was at a Mass, sitting in the congregation, and the priest performed a sprinkling rite for the Penitential Act like we had today – that part of the Mass when we actively seek God's mercy. At the very moment I felt the water splash over me, I received a wonderful feeling of freedom from sin. I didn't just ***know*** (point to head) that I'd been forgiven, I ***knew*** in my heart that God had forgiven me because I felt the working of His mercy.

And so, I invite you to examine whether you've ***felt*** the working of God's mercy because it transforms behaviour and animates desire to be merciful to others – as our heavenly Father is merciful to us. Perhaps the person whose name came to you earlier is the very person through whom God is inviting you to discover just how deeply His mercy has changed ***or is changing*** you.