

Everything in Life Needs a Time of Renewal

Year of Mercy #1

As many of you are aware, this last Tuesday began a special time for our church and for all of us in our spiritual journeys. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, is leading us on a journey of renewal. A journey of deeper love. A journey to shed all the brokenness and rebuild. A journey of mercy. Last Tuesday we celebrated the Immaculate Conception of Mary and we launched into the Year of Mercy.

So, what is mercy? And why do we have a whole year set aside to seek, give and celebrate it?

We have heard cries; “Mercy!! Mercy!!” I first connote this with a begging plea- a cry for someone to stop hurting you. A final ‘Give Up’ before the powers that be take you under.

Mercy is defined as; ‘with holding punishment when it is due’, so the giver of mercy is also the one who has the opportunity to punish.

But is that really what Mercy is all about? So once again I ask “What is Mercy?”

Mercy has been referred to as ‘Loves Second Name’. When you look at it in that light you see why God is the author and example for mercy.

We have an entire year devoted to mercy because well, to be honest, old habits are sometimes hard to break- Amen? Some things take time. This conversion to a more merciful self is a journey not a destination.

The Bible is where we can go for answers – the focus on this jubilee year is Christs command to “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful”

In reading on this year of mercy I found a fitting quote from Saint John Paul II:

He said; “ God is more interested in our future than in our past, he explained God takes past sin “seriously” but never “as the last word”, because He “wants each one of us to become the ‘best version’ of our self that HE wills for each one of us, personally, in His divine and eternal mind, and this requires conversion”

This conversion of shedding the old and embracing the new are the many benefits to mercy.

Everything in life needs a time of renewal. Nothing in life ever continues to grow without the old falling away.

God has designed us for growth. We need to grow and flourish as a fulfillment of His plan.

One way to facilitate growth is to shed old masks and habits.

The mask of bitterness and anger keep our eyes shielded from the true glories around us. To embrace the blessings that God has for you, you must tear away at those blinders before your time runs out. Why waste your precious time in the darkness?

Until those things that keep us in the darkness are reconciled they are like wounds that are left open that continue to hurt. They are open and leave you vulnerable for life to rub salt in them. And when life does this, which it will, you are reminded again and again of your hurt. You feel the burn of your anger. You feel the ache of betrayal. Those wounds are exposed and never really heal.

This is where mercy awards both the giver and receiver healing beyond measure. Once the healing begins then a new life can really start.

By this time, a gift from our parish has hopefully arrived at your home. We have been blessed to receive a wonderful book called "Rediscover Jesus" by Matthew Kelly. Father Arul wanted each household to have this book and use it as a tool throughout first this Advent season, and secondly, throughout this year of mercy.

Each of the chapters are designed to be short and relatable. There are questions to ponder and scripture for reference. It is meant to invoke prayer and personal examination. Matthew Kelly's approach is with honesty and humor.

Along with the book Father has included a letter. In this letter our pastor encourages us to use this year's time for reflection. One way to personally reflect is to write your thoughts down. Some people enjoy journaling and some don't feel drawn to that outlet.

But I would like to encourage all to give it a try. Put those roadblocks to mercy down on paper- give these roadblocks their proper name; Anger, Hurt, Sadness, Betrayal. "My anger keeps me from wanting to spend time with my family" "When I heard what they said about me, I just felt so hurt. I don't want anything to do with them" "They took my happiness away when..." "There is no way I could ever forgive them". Sometimes when those thoughts and feelings are out they lose some of the hold they can have on your heart. They are now trapped on paper and not in your mind or soul. It is a concrete representation to a conceptual thought.

At the end of this year all of these journals, thoughts, and road blocks will be offered up in fire. Symbolizing a new beginning, a new chapter, a new life.

By encouraging mercy, our church knows that more than just more good deeds are done- though that is an obvious outcome. Giving mercy helps give perspective. Seeing someone else's hurt or trial above our own is Christ like. I remember reading a long time ago about how when you are having a horrible time with life, pray. Pray not for yourself but for others. Think on how others need to be lifted up.

Remember as Jesus was dying on the cross? He had every opportunity to wail and scream. No one would have faulted him to complain and beg. But instead, he looked to his mother and proclaimed "Behold your son". He looked down and said to his disciple "Behold your mother". Even as he hung there dying he knew the importance of relationship and support. Through his pain he knew the importance of comforting others.

This year of mercy will open our hearts to true joy.

Like anything in this modern time, there is an App for that. There is a downloadable App to help encourage and support us in our journey.

The App is called 365 Days of Mercy. It is free and brought to us through Our Sunday Visitor. The App has "Daily Mercy"~ Merciful reminders for each day this year. "The Word Everyday"~ scriptural support for our journey. "Chaplet of Divine Mercy"~ a pocket guide to celebrating the Chaplet. "8 Ways to Mercy", "Indulgences" you even have access to "Daily Pope"~ signing up for the popes Twitter page. We are never without help or resources.

Also, I would encourage all to take a look at the kiosks that are located in the Narthex and at the West entrance. There are countless DVDs, CDs, books and pamphlets. All have a suggested donation as the cost. We are sitting on a goldmine of spiritual renewal. We just need to take advantage of it.

Last week we listened to our Arch Bishop speak on this year of mercy. During his talk he mentioned pledge cards to focus and solidify each of our commitments to the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. This week those cards are in each pew. Please fill out the bottom half with the pencils/pens provided. At the end of mass ushers will be standing by the doors to collect them.

I look forward to journeying with all of you during this Year of Mercy. Read your book, get the App, use a journal- But most of all seek and center yourselves in the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Go to your Blessed Father in prayer. Make the most of this Jubilee Year.

By Shannon Holthaus