

Octave of Easter

Saint Faustina Kowalska lived in the early part of the 20th century. She reported a vision of Jesus Christ, gazing compassionately across two streams a light emanating from his sacred heart, one red and one white, reminders of the blood and water that flowed from the side of Christ at his crucifixion, and symbols of the eucharist and baptism, through which we meet Christ today. Pope Saint John Paul II canonized Faustina on the Sunday after Easter and established it as Divine Mercy Sunday in the Catholic Church. Many churches have images of Christ under this title, as we do on the south wall.

“Mercy” has been a theme important to Pope Francis throughout his service to us. He has established this as a holy year of mercy for the entire church. On Good Friday last week, Pope Francis listened while Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa preached a homily about mercy. Fr. Raniero said that in the beginning, in Paradise, there was only love. But with sin came the need for mercy. He said the same is true of many marriages. At the beginning they are pure love. However, in time, “the limitations of each spouse emerge, and problems with health, finance, and children arise.” He said that what can save many marriages is not love but mercy. You know the problems of the other person, you may not love them in exactly the same way as in the beginning, but you can have mercy, and that can help a marriage mature.

Many people think that the opposite of mercy is justice. But the opposite of mercy is vengeance, not justice. If we receive punishment for something we’ve done wrong, that may be justice. But people who go beyond this, trying to punish beyond what is righteous, they commit vengeance. Fr. Raniero says that many people wrongly think that vengeance is a virtue, and this opinion starts already with children. “A large number of the stories we see on the screen and in video games are stories of revenge, passed off at times as the victory of a good hero. Half, if not more, of the suffering in the world (apart from natural disasters and illnesses) come from the desire for revenge, whether in personal relationships or between states and nations.”

The very first Christians suffered from anger and revenge, as we can tell in the Book of Revelation. Many people think that this book mysteriously predicts the end of the world, but it really describes the suffering of early Christians. In the opening verses that we hear today, John is in exile, he calls himself a brother to those who read the book, and he says that he shares their distress, the kingdom and endurance. The word “endurance” appears seven times in the Book of Revelation. The early Christians had to endure suffering and sorrow. They could do so because they experienced mercy from God.

Each of us has experienced mercy from God and from the people around us. It comes when we do not expect it or deserve it. Every day we have opportunities to offer mercy to others. When someone hurts us, the culture wants us to think we have the right to hurt them back, and hurt them even more. But Jesus taught us that we can do something different and better. We can show mercy.

Sunday, April 3, 2016