

## CHRISTMAS DAY HOMILY 2014

*Isaiah 52: 7-10 + Hebrews 1: 1-6 + John 1: 1-18*

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: 9:30 a.m., December 25, 2014

Mercy is different than forgiveness. Mercy grants new life.

To forgive another person means I am not going to hold this against you.  
Forgiveness means choosing not to be filled with resentment and bitterness  
for the rest of my life because of something done unto me---  
I am going to let it go, into the hands of God.  
Forgiveness is more for the sake of the one forgiving than the one being forgiven—  
it is medicine which we drink to heal our hurting heart.

Mercy is something much, much more. Mercy grants new life where it is undeserved.  
Mercy brings new life where it is not merited.

The chosen people of Israel are sustained by the mercy of God.  
The people of Israel are gifted with the Promised Land even though they grumbled  
and did not trust God in the desert.  
The Chosen People of Israel about 500 years later are held captive in Babylon.  
God forgives them for their transgressions which led to their captivity,  
but also gives them new life by His mercy.  
The prophet Isaiah proclaims the wonders of God's merciful love!  
God makes a way where there was no way for them  
to return home, even using the pagan Persian King Cyrus in his plan.  
God brings about new life from death by His merciful love, restoring Zion,  
raising up a new Jerusalem from the ruins of the old.

In the time before the birth of Jesus, God spoke in partial and various ways  
through the prophets about his saving, merciful love.  
But now that Word of Mercy takes human flesh in Jesus,  
born of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The divine, Eternal Word, in and through whom all things are made,  
who existed before time---it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> person the Divine Trinity  
who out of merciful love takes our flesh.  
The Eternal Word pitches his tent with humankind in order that we might be able  
to clearly hear God's word of merciful love spoken for all eternity.

In Jesus, the Word made flesh, we hear God's song of love for us, and by Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we hear a life-giving, saving word, and that is MERCY!!!

The Son of God seeks out sinners, because they need the healing balm of his merciful love.

The self-righteous, those who think they have it all together, who are self-sufficient and won't admit their weaknesses and frailties, close themselves off to the mercy of God in Jesus.

Those who are strict adherents to the Law and are constantly judging others who they deem not worthy—these self-righteous ones the Son of God seeks out as well, but they are not open to the great gift of his mercy, because they are unwilling to share it. Jesus is clear in his teaching and in his life: you can only receive it if you are willing to give it away.

The Son of God, through whom the entire universe is made, is born to die for us. This is what mercy looks like-- a just person laying down their life to save others who are not worthy of such a gift.

This is the saving mercy of which Pope Francis preaches and lives-- God's merciful love for the sinner.

Pope Francis challenges us to share this merciful love of God by reaching out beyond the safe confines of our church buildings to those who are lost, who are broken-hearted, who despair, who are poor, who hunger for the great gift of God's merciful love.

The setting for the French novel turned musical, *Les Miserables*, is in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in France.

The novel opens with the main character, Jean ValJean, completing his 19 year sentence on a chain gang for stealing bread so that his sister's children could eat.

Jean ValJean is granted freedom, but then finds himself starving because no one will hire him to work because of his criminal record.

Then a bishop welcomes Jean ValJean into his home, feeding him and giving him a place to stay the night.

In the middle of the night, Jean ValJean steals the Bishop's silver, so he can sell it and have some money.

However, he is quickly nabbed by the police, who drag him in front of the bishop, and ask the bishop if the silver is his.

The bishop surprises the police and Jean ValJean by stating that he had given his silver to Jean Valjean as a gift.

Then the bishop hands over to Jean ValJean the beautiful silver candlesticks, saying, "Here. You forgot these."

When the police leave, the bishop tells Jean ValJean, "I have purchased your life for God."

The bishop grants Jean ValJean new life by such a merciful act, and Jean ValJean vows that he will be the same instrument of mercy to others. The rest of the story reveals how he becomes that instrument of mercy, raising an orphaned child and saving this child's future husband from certain death. *This is how the marvelous word of God's merciful love takes our flesh.*

Or there is a married couple who I know who tried and tried and tried to have children, but to no avail.

My friends could have chosen to be angry at God and at life in general, or they could have chosen to "forgive" God and move on with their lives. Instead they became instruments of the Eternal Word's saving, merciful love by choosing to *adopt* three children.

Those three children have grown up into beautiful young people because of the merciful love of their adopted parents.

*This is one way how God speaks his word of mercy today and gives new life.*

Or there are the photojournalists who have given their lives to bring to light the atrocities of warfare and terror in the Middle East.

One of these brave souls was held hostage and then released.

He could have simply forgiven his hostage-takers, left the dangerous situation in the Middle East, and come home to safety.

Instead he chose to keep bringing to light the injustices there, until he gave his life, beheaded in a terrible act of brutality.

This is what mercy looks like--a life given away as complete gift in love of others.

Around this holy table on this joyful day, we celebrate the Sacrifice of merciful love that gives means to all of our sacrifices of merciful love.

We receive Him who is Mercy enfleshed in His Sacred Body and Blood.

We cry out for Mercy Himself before we come forward for Holy Communion.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

Even to the last little prayer we say before allowing the Son of God to come and dwell within us: "*Lord, I am not worthy to enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.*"

What is the word that the Lord Jesus says? MERCY!

The mercy that flows out of our Savior into the lives of we believers is a great gift.  
By it, we carry him, the Merciful One, into a world that desperately needs such a gift.  
He is born in us and through us by our words and deeds of mercy.  
Transforming a world of violence into peace, a world of retribution into justice,  
and stops the terrible force of hatred with self-giving love.

So that all the ends of the earth may see the saving power of God at work  
in and through God's people.

*Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi*