

Homily for the First Catechesis
Given by Archbishop Christopher Prowse
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Wednesday 27th July 2016
World Youth Day
Catholic Parish at Podleze
Krakow, Poland

Readings

Ephesians 2:4-10

John 8:1-11

NOW is the time to receive God's mercy. This is the theme of today's catechesis and Mass. Let us pray that we can receive God's mercy in the fullest measure, particularly in this Mass.

Mercy comes from the Latin word "Misericordiae". It literally means taking into the heart the miseries of others. This is what Jesus does for us. It is nicely summarised in the image of Jesus as the Sacred Heart.

The mercy of God is a great gift of God. It is not something that you and I have earned. In the First Reading today from St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, he described God "Who is rich in mercy." St Paul then states starkly that, "by grace you have been saved... this is not from you: it is the gift of God." Mercy as a gift from God is a lesson we must learn. We do not earn mercy and we do not buy mercy; we are given mercy as gift. This is all because of God's love for us and the beauty of God's mercy showering upon us. As St Paul says, "We are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus." Let us reflect upon that... that we are the handiwork of God!

Having received mercy, mercy must be given, as the Beatitude says, "Blessed are the merciful, for mercy they shall find."

So now we move with these thoughts to the Gospel. It is the familiar story of Jesus and His encounter with the woman who was caught in the act of committing adultery.

I loved the two silences in this Gospel today.

The first silence, I think, is the silence after the religious leaders try to put Jesus in a theological bind by presenting this woman to him and seeking some response. They are not at all interested in the woman. She is just used as a pawn towards their way of trying to trick Jesus.

The first silence of Jesus was that, "He bent down and began to write on the ground." What precisely he was writing on the ground, we don't really know. But we do know that there would have been a silence amongst them all. Then he stands up and says, "Let the one among you who is without sin, be the first to cast the stone at her." Jesus becomes like a mirror in front of them. They can see themselves as Jesus sees them with His merciful eye gaze at them. It really cuts them down in their pride

and arrogance! One by one they start to move off quietly, until Jesus is left alone with the woman. "Then Jesus straightens up again and says to the woman face to face, 'Woman where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She replied, 'No one sir.'" I love this word "Sir". Although she does not know who Jesus is, he is a stranger to her presumably, she calls him "Sir". She knows that he is offering respect and giving her a dignity that the others have not given her.

There is a second silence here. Jesus just looks at her and she looks at Him. Nobody can remain the same when the merciful loving eyes of Jesus look into the depth of a person through their eyes. Then Jesus gives her the freeing words of absolution and a penance. It is a kind of confession. He says to her, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore." She has been given fullness of forgiveness, but also counselled to amend her ways and not repeat the path of darkness that has brought her the very fragile situation she has, up until this point, found herself.

Over these days, may we allow Jesus to silently look at us with his love and mercy.

In doing this, no one can remain the same. This requires some silence. I know it's difficult, because we are all moving from one thing to another. We are also very tired, because pilgrims are always on the move. But in our quiet times and prayer time, all we need to do is to allow for Jesus to look at us silently and lovingly and for us to look back. Let Him do to us what he has done to the woman in today's Gospel.

A number of us visited, just the other day, a retreat sanctuary that was very popular with St John Paul II. It is called Kalvaria. In English, it is the word "Calvary". There is a beautiful image of Mary and Jesus that was very beloved by St John Paul II. It shows Jesus and Mary looking at each other eye to eye, with one cheek pressing on the other. It is a beautiful embrace of love. St John Paul II, throughout his life, came back frequently to this image in the Monastery of Kalvaria and meditated on it long and hard. Again, it is about the gaze of Jesus with Mary, and Mary with Jesus. Let us imagine this in our prayer that we too can join in their gaze. Allow Jesus and Mary both to gaze at us with their love and mercy. If we do this deeply in prayer, I am sure that we can never be the same again. We will hear Jesus say to us, "Go and sin no more. You are forgiven!" Let us think particularly of receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation -Penance over these days to sacramentalise this embrace of mercy.