Divine Mercy Sunday 2025

 It is God who is rich in mercy, whom Jesus Christ has revealed to us as Father. *“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and sin”* (Ex 34, 6-7).

 The name “God” encompasses many attributes, like patience, benevolence, and omnipotence. There’s one word that God encompasses most: mercy. Mercy is what connects people to God, reminds people that life has meaning, allows people to remember that they will always be loved, and that their attempts to live righteously are not in vain.

 God is central in our lives, in all places, at all times, and in very specific ways. To encounter and to dialogue with one another at times enhances our understanding of the faith. And so, in the above quote from the Book of Exodus, five adjectives, enduring adjectives are at the core of our belief, as well as in the very divine embodiment of Jesus: *merciful, compassionate and gracious, tenaciously faithful, forgiving, and forever steadfast in love.*

 Pope Francis speaks about the merciful nature of God, who seeks to heal and forgive over and over again. Human sin cannot destroy God’s purposes for us; the mercy of God will triumph over wrath. He insists that a heart that is open receives God’s forgiveness. We are social beings, and forgiveness has a social implication. Sin wounds the human person, our sisters and brothers, society as a whole. The gift of mercy is the marrow of the Gospel and the heart of the Church. We have received freely, we give freely. We are called to serve Christ Crucified and Risen in the marginalized and outcast, the hungry and thirsty, the naked and imprisoned, the ill and unemployed, the persecuted and those who seek refuge. This is where we find God, where we touch the Lord, where we experience mercy.

The Church goes forth toward those who are wounded, to show the maternal and merciful Christ, who are in need of an attentive ear, in need of understanding and forgiveness. Conscious of our sins, of what we have done and what we have failed to do, we recognize our need for forgiveness and mercy.

Because God is forever steadfast in love, *“many peoples shall come and say, let us climb the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths”* (Is 2:3). Yes, there will be dark events and trials by fire because of peoples’ own turning away from God, then Isaiah will say *“come, let us walk in the light of the Lord”* (Is2:5). Then, there will be a time when God and His people can reunite in love and faith.

The daily updates and funeral of Pope Francis compelled me to visit the movie, “The Two Popes.” Without a doubt the two look-alikes gave such moving scenes. There were moments in the film when I thought I was actually looking at Benedict XVI and Francis themselves. Of course, I tolerated the Hollywood moments, but the human and personal revelations were stellar. For me, the greatest moment came to peer into the humanity of these two great popes of the Roman Catholic Church. In their shared humanity, I found a profound example in giving and receiving mercy and forgiveness. At certain moments the virtues of a gentle manner and of a respectful way were characteristics of both.

I was sensitive to how the two popes were portrayed, particularly as Francis was telling the story of his vocation, and Benedict laughing and sharing his love of classical music; how these two sensitive hearts engaged in brief and unfriendly debate; Benedict’s dark night of the soul experience and Francis whistling Abba’s song “Dancing Queen” (lol) and leading Benedict in dancing the Tango at their departure. I was moved by a minimum of fiction and by the real humanity of these two great popes. What I was experiencing came from the fact that I love both of them. Their deficiencies were not overlooked; their hearts already pierced and wounded. In his book *“The Name of God is Mercy,”* Pope Francis speaks about *“the nature of God who seeks to forgive over and over again. Human sin cannot destroy God’s purposes for us. Mercy triumphs over wrath.”*

Mercy and forgiveness. Today’s Gospel. Today’s agenda to forgive and absolve in spite of our differences. People have taken to the streets too quickly the polarization and divisiveness of society; to quick in pointing out the splinters while ignoring the beams; to have forgotten how to enjoy together the simplest of joys like standing at a piano, watching a television show, or cheering for a soccer game.

Sisters and Brothers, we pray: Agios o Theos, Agios ischyros, Agios athanatos eleison imas. And we ask a blessing: Khristos anesti! Alethos anesti!

