

Our Lady of the Airways Parish

Second Sunday of Easter (of Divine Mercy), 2020



Dear Friends in Christ,

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever.

Many years ago, while I was still working in the financial industry, I remember having a discussion with some colleagues concerning a number of religious topics. The central question being debated that day was whether evil people, who have committed great atrocities and crimes against humanity experience - Hitler, Stalin, Mao Zedong, just to name a few - can experience God's mercy and forgiveness? The majority argued in the negative, with some expressing the thought that these men should 'rot in hell forever'. Although I was a fallen away Catholic at the time, guided by the little Catholic sensibility that had remained within me, I sheepishly retorted, "No, that is not true! God's mercy extends to everyone." With that response, we returned to work.

As Catholics, we profess a belief in a loving and merciful God. Saint John Paul II remarked: "*Mercy constitutes the fundamental content of the messianic message of Christ and the constitutive power of His mission.*" Jesus preached the theme of mercy during his Galilean ministry. He gave many parables, such as *the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, the Prodigal Son*, which emphasized God's continual desire to seek out and be reconciled with sinners, Jesus himself said, "*I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*" Jesus' actions and stories reflect in various ways of God's divine love, boundless mercy and forgiveness, and refusal to limit the measure of his grace. Thus, mercy is fundamental to who Jesus is and what Jesus Christ is all about. Notwithstanding the undeniable reality of God's infinite mercy, our response is also important. St. Augustine famously said, "*God who created you without you, will not save you without you.*" These words highlight the free will every person inherently possesses. It reminds us poignantly that God cannot save us without our cooperation, or if we are unwilling to accept his call for repentance and conversion.

In today's gospel, St. John the Evangelist touches upon the sacramental dimension of mercy. While the disciples gathered behind locked doors for fear of the Jews, Jesus suddenly appeared before them and said, "*Peace be with you.*" After showing them his hands and feet, *Jesus says to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."* *When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*

That Jesus breathed on his disciples and gave them the Holy Spirit was a deliberate act. His actions was reminiscent of God's own as seen in the book of Genesis. Just as God "*breathed into the nostrils of Adam and he became a living being,*" Jesus also inaugurated a new creation through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Although the Lord reconciled the world to Himself through His passion, death and resurrection, His deepest desire, His most urgent mission after the resurrection, the first thing He wanted to do, was give the Apostles the power to begin reconciling people to Himself in the Sacrament of Confession. And the Church continues to carry out this mission even today!

It never ceases to amaze me how transformative this Sacrament is to sinners. I often see this in my priestly ministry, especially when I hear the confession of individuals, who have been separated from God for ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years! These people often come to confession feeling extremely alienated from God because of their unconfessed sins. They are burdened by years of guilt, sorrow, and regret. Yet, remarkably something always happens after they have confessed their sins and made their Act of Contrition. Upon hearing the words of absolution, "...*I absolve you of your sins, In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,*" their demeanour immediately changes: tears often flow; they are filled with joy; and a sense of peace envelopes their entire being. In short, they become a 'new creation.'

Given that we are living in the midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic, having access to the Sacrament of Reconciliation has become somewhat problematic and difficult at this time. Do not be troubled! If you are not able to see a priest for the Sacrament, pray the Act of Contrition as best as you can, and commit going to Confession, when conditions allow. As the Catechism reminds us: "*When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called 'perfect' (contrition of charity). Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible.*" God is so good that He can even bestow upon us the grace to make a perfect Act of Contrition and thus enable us to experience His mercy and forgiveness.

"*Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever.*" We praise God for pouring out His mercy upon us through the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And in a special way, we also thank Him for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where we can experience His mercy every time we come and confess our sins in this great tribunal of love.

During these difficult and trying times, let us try to imitate God's example, by generously showing mercy and bestowing forgiveness upon everyone we meet, as we journey together in this valley of tears.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rev. Thomas Lim". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "T" and "L".

Fr. Thomas Lim