

Divine Mercy Sunday Homily

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Some verses from Sacred Scripture are mysterious, even paradoxical, and so can be difficult to absorb. Prayer, reverence and the mind of the Church will help to bring us enlightenment. For instance, when Jesus cries from the Cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46), what does He mean? Has the Father abandoned Him? How can Jesus, who is God, lose the vision of God? We can understand this cry to reveal the full solidarity of Our Savior with the condition of a fallen world—man without God—but it is no less mysterious for that attempt to grasp its meaning.

And this line from St. Paul’s letter to the Colossians might be used as another example, where he writes, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of His body, the Church.” (1:24) Why does St Paul seem to suggest that something is “lacking” in the passion and suffering of Christ...and that only he can “complete” it? The Apostle does *not* mean that Jesus left something undone, or that we have not been fully redeemed, or that any human being can add anything to the perfect work of the God-Man.

What he suggests, in poetic language, is this: Jesus Christ *conquered* sin and death by His own Cross and Resurrection...but in so doing, He has not *ended* the suffering of this life, as we know from our own human experience. Instead, Christ *transformed* suffering, gave it purpose, made it *noble*... and He left it to His Church to *continue* His redemptive work in the world, and in that sense, *perfect* it, or bring it to completion.

Let me see if I can explain this another way. Christ established His Holy Church to bring the grace and mercy, truth and peace of God to those—like you and me—who would not have the benefit of enjoying His physical presence and hearing the sound of His voice, as those who knew and encountered Him 2,000 years ago did. And in today’s Gospel, Jesus makes plain that we are at no disadvantage, when He says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” (Jn 20:29) Those words are *intended* for us, and are meant to *describe* us.

Now in matters relating to belief (the Creed we will say shortly), to the need for and essential character of the Sacraments (to include the Eucharist) and to the moral life (the Commandments that Jesus told us are necessary for joy in this life and in the life to come)...in these matters, the Church speaks with the voice and authority of Christ, as He told us on several occasions (cf Mt 16:18; Lk 10:16; Jn 15:5), to include His words to the Apostles in today’s Gospel: “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” (Jn 20:21)

The *Catechism* puts it this way: *“It is from God’s love for all men that the Church in every age receives both the obligation and the vigor of her missionary dynamism...Salvation is found in the truth...the Church, to whom this truth has been entrusted, must go out to meet their desire, so as to bring them the truth.”* (851)

We call the Church the “Mystical Body of Christ,” and “the Bride of Christ,” and both are good expressions for us to understand that the Church—in the fullness of that term—is a *living being* to which we are joined by virtue of our Baptism. Baptism incorporates us into Christ’s body (and that is one reason why infant baptism should never be delayed in favor of a family gathering, etc...we don’t want to deprive the child of the grace of becoming a Christian any longer than is absolutely

necessary...and in many cases, in my experience, the delay—often months, sometimes years—follows from reasons that do not take into account the spiritual welfare of an infant soul; a good norm is about two weeks after the child is born).

So, after the pattern of the Master, the Church, as His Body or Bride, must both *convey* and *live* the fullness of the Gospel...she must *teach* the truth and *be* the truth of Christ, even as Jesus Himself marked out the narrow path (cf Mt 7:13) to Heaven by His words and by His example. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, as promised by the Lord (Jn 14:16, 17, 26; Jn 16:13), makes possible her fidelity to Christ in matters relating to the Creed, the Sacraments and the Commandments...and the grace of the Holy Spirit makes it possible for each of us to strive for and live a holy life.

Let's return to St Paul's paradoxical line: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His body, the Church." To help us better understand St Paul's divinely inspired words, I refer to the Catechism again: "The Church, urged on by the Spirit of Christ, must walk the road Christ Himself walked, a way of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice even to death, a death from which He emerged victorious by His Resurrection." (852)

To be faithful to Christ the Bridegroom means that His Bride the Church must re-present the Paschal Mystery—the saving life, passion, death and resurrection of Our Blessed Lord—to the world in two ways: 1. By living these mysteries through the liturgical calendar each year (from Advent to the Feast of Christ the King); through her sacramental life; and through her preaching of the fullness of the Gospel; and 2. In her own *being*...the Church as Christ's Mystical Body and Bride, must in her very being re-live the events of Jesus life...she must walk the road to Calvary and suffer for Him and with Him, and out of love for Him.

Unlike her Master who was perfect, the Church must be ever purified, because individually her members are always vulnerable to human weakness: selfishness, neglect, malice. Once more, please allow me to quote from the *Catechism*:

On her pilgrimage, the Church has also experienced the "discrepancy existing between the message she proclaims and the human weakness of those to whom the Gospel has been entrusted." Only by taking the "way of penance and renewal," the "narrow way of the cross," can the People of God extend Christ's reign. For "just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and oppression, so the Church is called to follow the same path if she is to communicate the fruits of salvation to men." (853)

These words do not excuse the infidelity of some, to include the grievous betrayal of those entrusted with the spiritual welfare of the innocent and weak. Jesus made plain His vehemence with regard to the scandal and harm of "little ones"...that it would be "better for him if a millstone were hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea" (Lk 17:2) than to wound or mislead anyone. This sober warning applies to all Christians, that we take care by word and example *never* to contradict any aspect of the Gospel...especially today the moral teachings of the Church about the virtue and beauty of chastity, mocked by so many, including some within the fold.

The Church is suffering now, and it must be said that much of this suffering has come at that hands of shepherds who, again, though neglect or malice, failed to safeguard the precious souls under their care. We pray for justice and purification.

But we do not lose faith. We know the faith of the Church is true: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” (Jn 20:29) The Gospel story we know and trust is not sanitized of human weakness, to include the weakness of the Apostles. And we know that St Paul was correct: we can atone for sin, our own and those of others, by willingly and cheerfully holding up the Cross in our own daily, normal, *Christian* lives...by re-presenting the Passion of Christ, strengthened by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Only the Cross of Christ will save us.

Jesus told us His disciples would be persecuted, as He was persecuted. (cf Mt 5:10-12; 10:22; Jn 15:18-21; Jn 16:33) He also said, “Love your enemies and pray for those persecute you.” (Mt 5:44) And in the Garden of Gethsemane, He called Judas, “Friend,” (Mt 26:50)...and He meant it.

Today is the Feast of the Divine Mercy. Please receive the Sacrament of Penance soon to gain the special graces the merciful Heart of Christ holds for you. In the Gospel passage for today, three times did Our Lord say, “Peace be with you.” And so does the Master want us all to maintain, now and always, the peace that the world cannot give or take. (cf Jn 14:27)