

I know you may find this hard to believe, but every so often during Mass, I'll get really annoyed. I know, you're shocked. I'll think the altar servers are moving too fast or too slow, or the deacon isn't reading the gospel the way I want him to read the gospel, or the music just isn't hitting the right notes, and the judgmental thoughts will just bloom inside of me in all their sinful glory. And I'll think, "That's it. I'm going to give them a piece of my mind."

Maybe you've had a similar experience. I know for me, without fail, whenever I get on my high horse like that, the Lord lovingly, in a very tender, Fatherly way, knocks some sense into me. I remember once when I was in a mood like that, it was like I suddenly forgot how to read. I couldn't get the words out, and I'm sure it was very irritating to hear my constant stopping and starting. And whenever I'm in that mood, without fail, it pops into my mind that the sacristans are probably annoyed at my habit of coming to the sacristy only shortly before Mass, or the ushers are probably annoyed when I forget to tell them about something different they need to do that day. You would think I would learn, but it seems I am often times in need of a reminder, so God reminds me: You're human, too. You make mistakes, too. You need others to be patient and forgiving towards you, too.

This Lent, we are reflecting on the concept of mercy, both on receiving mercy and showing mercy. When we go to confession, we are confident that we will receive

God's mercy. When Jesus walked the earth, he went around showing mercy. When he preached to his disciples, he told them to be merciful. That is how we overcome the power of sin – through mercy.

Last week, I spoke about how Christ demonstrated this to us in a real and definitive way on the cross. When he allowed himself to be mocked, beaten and crucified, he appeared to be the embodiment of weakness, of capitulation, of failure. But in fact, it took God-like strength for him to do what he did, to pray to his Father to forgive us even while he hung upon the cross. And because of the mercy he showed us, he defeated the enemy that had enslaved us ever since our first parents turned away from God. His mercy defeated the power of sin.

That is how the Son of God responded to sin, in the only way that can defeat it – he did not respond with wrath, or with revenge, or with condemnation – he responded with mercy, and because he did, sin was overcome. That is how the Son of God responds to sin, but how do we?

I started this homily with some silly examples, but of course, there are more serious ways we hurt each other. How do we stop someone else's sin from spreading, like tentacles, into our minds, into our hearts, into our relationships with others, into our relationship with God? Others will sin against us, that's out of our control, it's going to happen. What is in our control is our response.

Again, what mercy looks like is different in each situation. I can't address every specific situation from the pulpit, I can only speak broadly, so please don't interpret this as me telling you exactly what you have to do in your unique relationships. What mercy looks like is different in each situation. But in general, to show someone mercy is to release them from the bonds of their sin. We can hold someone prisoner by their sin, never letting them forget, keeping the burden of their sin around their neck, weighing them down, defining who they are to us: a sinner. In one of the videos on formed.org that is a part of this series, there was a great quote that I'd never heard before. "The devil knows your name and calls you by your sins. God knows your sins and calls you by your name." To show them mercy is to give them a chance at redemption. To show them mercy is to give them a chance to be free from their sin. To show them mercy is to restore them to their place as a beloved child of God, and not just as "one who sinned."

But we will only be moved to do that if we first recognize our own need for mercy. In today's gospel, people came to Jesus to talk about the calamities that some of their neighbors had suffered. Some Galileans had suffered the dishonor of having their blood mingled with the pagan sacrifices. Others had been killed when a tower had fallen on them. Some of the people were interpreting these tragedies as signs that the victims must have been sinners, and were being punished because of it. And these victims most certainly were sinners, but Jesus points out to his

listeners that so are they. So he tells them to not concentrate on the sins of others, don't sit in judgment over those around them. Instead, they should repent of their own sins, recognize their own need for mercy, or they themselves will suffer a worse fate.

When our minds are turned towards how others are failing, how others are falling short in how God is calling them to act, we can get on our high horse, sit in judgment of others. But we are human, too. We are sinners, too. We are in need of mercy, too. And if we are willing to go to God and ask for that mercy, to ask to be released from our sins and restored to God's friendship, then we should be willing to show that same mercy to others. If we think we don't need forgiveness, then we're not very likely to extend it to others. If we recognize our need for forgiveness, we won't condemn others for needing it, too.

Last week, I invited you, if you're struggling with showing mercy to someone who has sinned against you, to take the first step and resolve that you don't want to let that sin persist in your life, that you want to overcome the power that that sin is exerting over you. If you've done that, the next step is to recognize your own need for mercy. You, too, have sinned, as we all have. Maybe not in the same way, maybe not to the same degree, maybe not towards that person, but you've sinned and have needed forgiveness. Bring that to your heavenly Father in prayer. Ask

Him to help you feel His mercy in your heart so you can understand better the gift you have to give in showing mercy. Take your next step in overcoming the power of sin in the world, and replacing it with mercy.