

Romans 12: 1-2

“So then, my brothers, because of God’s great mercy to us I appeal to you: Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer. Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God—what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect.”

Honestly, when I read this passage and reflected on it, I really struggled. In order for me to honestly reflect, I knew that I had to “name” what was bothering me. For me, hearing the words, “living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service...” was difficult because ever since I was confirmed in the eighth grade, I have truly made a commitment to serve God however He saw fit. The struggle with service has come into play because I have been thinking about my work and service to the church—the time and energy put into it— and wondering, fearing rather, what my family has suffered or missed out on because of what I do, and what I feel called to do. For my family, I do not want church to be the place of “we have to be here because of Mom’s job...”, I truly want church to be a place where they *want to come* because of fellowship and community, to be fed, and nourished with Sacred Scripture and Eucharist. So, knowing my struggles, I truly asked God, “What is it that you want me to know, to get out of this scripture, to share with others?”

The word, “mercy”, really struck home with me. I believe that God is merciful, but what exactly is mercy? By definition, mercy refers to both compassionate behaviour on the part of those in power, or divine mercy shown to the someone who is sorrowful for their wrongdoing. Because of God’s compassion and love, he is merciful to me. He forgives me for my faults, failings, and sins. I had to ask myself, where is my mercy to other people? Why do I struggle with forgiveness of others? Why is it so difficult, especially to those closest to me?

When I think of mercy, I think of the image of the Son of Man that was given by Dr. Megan McKenna at last year’s mission when she talked about the Blind Man standing up for truth, humbly standing before the “Son of Man”. Truthfully, I have never thought twice about the “Son of Man”. I know that I have heard the term, but I never put much thought into it, as Jesus was always the “Son of God” to me. Well, her explanation of the Son of Man has struck such a cord in me—it is based on the experience and reflection of Fr. Jon Sobrino, a Jesuit, whose life was spared during the El Salvador massacre of six of his fellow Jesuit brothers and the housekeeper and her daughter in 1989. To the best of my understanding, this is what Fr. Jon Sobrino’s encountering the Son of Man would be like: When we die and are on our way to heaven, we encounter the Son of Man, the beaten, persecuted, crucified Christ, who is standing in front of a sea of people. The rows of people immediately behind him are people that have either hurt me or who I have hurt, without any forgiveness or reconciliation between us. Then, the subsequent rows are the people who have been hurt by those people because of my actions or inaction—it is like a “negative” ripple effect. So, as I am there before Him, Jesus, turns to these people and asks them, should we let her in? Initially, this description hit me very hard, but, the more I thought about it, I have been

blessed by it because for me, in that moment where Jesus asks, ‘should we let her in?’ is a “purgatorial” moment, where I see where I have failed to forgive. Whether it was my pride or arrogance that got in the way with God and other people. At that humbling moment, I am able to see my sins and am given the opportunity for forgiveness; then, I experience God’s mercy and am welcomed into the kingdom. So, now, I now I work toward forgiveness without needing or receiving the other person’s forgiveness in return. This is not easy, but I forgive because that is what I am called to do.

Through that recognition of God’s mercy, through that forgiveness, I am called to change inwardly. By letting God into my life, I allow change. This realization opens my mind and heart; allowing change in my thoughts, then change in my behavior. This change in behavior moves from the focus being on myself, my wants and needs, and to concern for others. Ultimately, I can see the goal of this calling, which is to love God with all my heart and mind, and to love my neighbor. ***How I live becomes how I actually love.***

Behavior can be reactionary, but for the most part, behavior is a conscious choice. I believe that the church gives me a means of transformation through community, through service of others, and through the gifts of the sacraments. It is not just going through the motions, but also consciously making a decision to participate—it’s a choice, a conscious effort on my part—to let God in (*for God to increase and for me to decrease*). I know that I cannot atone for my sins, if I could, I would not need God’s grace and forgiveness. Therefore, the sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, Eucharist, Confirmation, Holy Orders, Marriage, and the Anointing of the Sick are all about bringing a “change” within, which is part of the grace that is accepted and received.

To inwardly change, to let God into my life, is not always easy. There are risks that I take whether it is alienation among family and peers, loss of friendships, rejection, etc. But, that is the sacrifice, the living sacrifice of myself to God. My sacrifice is led by my trust, my belief in God, to be true to myself and to others through love, God’s love.

So, what is the will of God, what is God calling me to do? For many years I have often asked God, “What is my calling?”, “Give me a sign...”, “What do you want me to do with the life you have given me?” I believe my answer is to be a steward of everything God has given me—the talents and the gifts, the good and the bad—the “all” of everything. It is in praise and thanksgiving that I journey day by day with God leading me, whether it is in my ministry as a wife, mother, daughter, or sister or in my ministry of service to all of my brothers and sisters in Christ. It is all about God’s love and how I live my life is ultimately how I love.

Lent Reflection 3

Trisha Labbe

Marian Servant of the Visitation

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