

Divine Mercy

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When we hear the word "Mercy" a number of images come into our minds. We think of mercy in terms of forgiveness or of absolving someone from responsibility. We may readily imagine a judge delivering a lenient sentence. We also hear of someone who "throws himself on the mercy of the Court. As Catholics we are accustomed to hearing and practicing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. If you read the Book of Exodus, 34:6 there are the 13 mercies of God (recited at every Passover meal).

Every Sunday we repeat "Lord have Mercy." It is interesting that the Greek expression at Mass is "Kyrie Eleison." The Greek word "Eleos" the word expressing alms or relief to the poor. It is also interesting that if you attend Mass in Italy the translation is "Signore, Pieta." That Italian word is associated with the power image of the famous statue of Michelangelo which depicts the Blessed Mother holding the body of the Crucified Christ.

However, I propose that the Divine Mercy that is given to us through Jesus Christ holds a deeper dimension and reality. In the Old Testament, the word most often used (as in Exodus 34) "Rachamim." This word for mercy is derived from the Hebrew root word for a mother's womb. The sacred place where new life is conceived and from which human life is born (both carried, cared for and birthed). Divine Mercy is about a new birth in Christ giving salvation and redemption, and most importantly His friendship.

Observe what the Risen Christ manifests. He appears to Peter who denied Him; to the Apostles who ran away from Him and would not even watch Him in His Passion to Calvary. His mercy is more than forgiving them. The deeper mercy of the Risen Christ is that He empowers them to continue His mission, His Gospel and His Presence in the Sacraments--especially the Eucharist. He restores them to become a part of His life. A judge can give you a merciful dismissal of your case, but he/she certainly does not want your friendship.

An extreme example of Divine Mercy is in the call and conversion of Saul of Tarsus, St. Paul. Christ's Mercy is that He chooses His greatest persecutor to be His greatest evangelist.

Perhaps His greatest mercy is that Jesus Christ is "thankful." Remember, the Greek word "Eucharist" that we use for Holy Communion means giving thanks. The word used over the bread and wine of the Last Supper that become His body and blood. Eucharist is the most merciful Divine gift for participation in the life of Jesus Christ and His mission today. Through His mercy we are invited and allowed to participate in His Eucharist, education, and evangelization in spite of our brokenness, betrayals, and belittled lives. Jesus Christ cares greatly

for what we can become for the future of His mission. His mercy reaches out to the restored meaningfulness of our lives (on us and the whole world) "for the sake of His sorrowful passion."