

Readings for Mercy Day:

First Reading: Ephesians 2:4-10
Second Reading: Catherine's Letter to Elizabeth Moore dated 20 Dec 1840
Gospel: John 2:1-11 (Mary at Cana)

HOMILY FOR MERCY DAY, BAGGOT STREET, 2010

It is a joy and a privilege for me to share some thought on the Word of God on this very special day and in the sacred space that is Catherine's chapel.

We are fed today – as befitting a feast – on a very rich diet. The first reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians is the basis and source of all that follows. In this extract Paul is at pains to convince us of the gracious and generous love that God has for us. Just listen again to some of the phrases in this short passage: God is rich in faithful love, God has loved us with a great love; through grace we have been saved and have been given a place with Christ; God has shown great goodness towards us; God is extraordinarily rich in grace; being saved as we are is sheer gift on God's part. Paul highlights three reasons why God's graciousness towards us is extraordinary:

God saved us while we were dead in our sins – when we least 'deserved' to be saved;

We have been saved not by anything of our own – but by a gift from God;

We have been saved not by anything we have done, so that none of us can claim the credit.

I love that word 'grace' and when I ponder on it I am always drawn back to the beautiful Irish word for grace: "Rath." This is the word used in the blessing: "Rath Dé ort." Rath is an Old Irish word and it means the act of bestowing. So our blessing translates as: "May the bestowing of God be upon you." I think it captures something of what Paul is trying to emphasise about the gracious giving, the GIFT quality of the grace that God has shown us. We do not deserve it, it is not from ourselves and it comes not because of anything we have done, or ever could do, but from the generous, gracious, abundant, outpouring of God's own love. When we allow ourselves to be loved in this way, we are truly God's work of art.

I think Catherine too had some inkling of that kind of love in the extract from the letter we have just heard. She wrote this letter to Elizabeth Moore just before Christmas in 1840. She was worn out from all the letters she had to write and yet she re-wrote most of a letter she had written earlier that day in the hope that it might bring a smile to the face of someone else – and of course this was long before the instantaneous method of copying and pasting with which we are so familiar today! Catherine spoke to De Sales White of the truth of the extraordinary love God has for us that if God looks towards us with ‘complacency’, with love and approval for one moment each day, we shall get on joyfully to the end of our journey. And then she is anxious to give some personal message to Elizabeth Moore as well and she says:

Now what shall I say to yourself – worn out as I am. You don’t require much. Your path is now “strewed with” flowers – for the Bazaar – and all the pretty dolls & toys – will bring you back to the gaiety and innocence of childhood, and when you see them changed into Bread & Broth & Blankets, your heart will rejoice, and your offering will – I trust – be rendered fully acceptable by the pure love which produces it.

There is something truly profound about dolls and toys being changed into bread and broth and blankets. This is where we come to the kernel of today’s feast. Dolls and toys are changed into bread, broth and blankets – so that the poor are fed and clothed. Water is changed into wine – so that the bride and groom are not embarrassed and so that all may witness this first sign of the generosity and abundance of the reign of Jesus. Bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ so that we can become sharers in the banquet of the Eucharist.

Through the power of God’s grace at work, through the great love with which we are loved, we who are sinners are brought into the very relationship of God. It is that very same power that transforms our humble, fumbling efforts into something of grace and beauty in the ordinariness of our loving everyday. Today’s gospel challenges us to really believe that even when we have given of our best and our water jars stand empty, God’s bountiful and abundant generosity will not be found wanting: first the empty jars are filled and then what is in them is transformed so that new, better wine flows freely and in

abundance. We could do well ponder the question: “What is the transformation that is being brought about in us, in me through the raw material of our daily lives?”

We have been loved with an abundant love and so we are called to love in the same way. But we are not alone in that task: We have been given wonderful models for our becoming truly loving people – models who have shown us what it is to love with that same kind of love. On this feast of Our Lady of Mercy, the Jesus of Cana calls us, empowers us to be open to how the glory of God might be revealed through our response to the need of another whatever that need might be. Mary of Cana teaches us how to reach out in sensitivity to the plight of another while being utterly confident that God, in God’s own way will bring blessings beyond our imagining. Catherine challenges us to support one another on our journey through life even when we feel worn out; we can love as she did simply by bringing a smile to the face of another, by seeking ways to find a deeper meaning in the seemingly mundane and ordinary and above all by encouraging the other to come to a firm belief in the power of God’s love. And all of this is possible only because of the great love with which we have been loved by our God who is extraordinarily rich in grace.

by Aine Barrins rsm