

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Text: St. Luke 6:36-42

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Why does our worship begin with a procession led by a crucifix? Is it not, in fact, to remind us of and show our faith in the gracious mercy of God, our FATHER in Heaven? For God gave His only-begotten SON into the cruelest of deaths so that we may live. Indeed, the sacrifice of God's Son is what it means to *"be merciful just as your FATHER also is merciful."*

Thus, if you are to heed our LORD's command to *"be merciful just as your FATHER also is merciful"* you must first see and understand the lengths to which our FATHER and His SON, JESUS, were and are willing to go in order that we be saved that we may have eternal life. I say, *"were and are"* because though the crucifixion of our LORD happened nearly 2000 years ago, the result of His sacrifice is timeless, stretching as far back as Adam and Eve, and as far forward into our future as the coming Day of our LORD when He will return on the clouds of heaven to judge us.

That day could arrive as soon as today or as far into the future as our minds can imagine; it really matters not. On that day our LORD will mete out His judgment and all mankind shall stand before Him to receive in like measure, the measure of his or her mercy. Therefore, *"Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."* See, our LORD is telling you beforehand that when the Day of Judgement arrives you will not be taken unaware.

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher." Are you a disciple of CHRIST? Then follow the example of your Teacher. You have not been measured by the wrath of God, but with His mercy. If our FATHER in Heaven has been so gracious to you, are you not also obligated to show the same mercy to your neighbor?

Take heed then, for our God has promised wrath to the unmerciful. Saint James tells us, *"So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the Law of liberty."* Here, James is speaking of the Gospel of the LORD as the canon or standard of our judgment; for with such have you, yourself, been judged. Beware then, the canon of the Law of God which you, yourself, transgress daily. Rather *"Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."* for as Saint James continues, *"... judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy."*

Therefore, the Law of God is not written that one should use it to judge others; it is written that one should judge oneself. Thus, the proper use of the Law of God is not in comparing oneself to his or her neighbor, but in comparing oneself to God. For God is the Standard by which *all* things are to be judged.

Thus, the Law of God compares what is imperfect to perfect, what is unholy to that which is holy, it compares the unjust to the just and sinner to saint. The Law, therefore, does not allow for any possibility that we should be satisfied with ourselves in *any* way. It certainly does not allow that we should use the Law or our own self-righteousness in judgment of our neighbor. In the third chapter of Romans St. Paul writes: *“There is none righteous, no, not one....”* and again, *“Now we know that whatever the Law says, it says to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the Law is the knowledge of sin.”*

You see, we are all blind guides, stumbling about in the mire of our sin and dangerously close to falling into a pit of pietism and pharisaic self-righteous judgmentalism on the right, and paganism or pure atheistic unbelief on the left. With ourselves as the standard of measure by which we judge there is not much which would not be permissible in this life, if, indeed, there truly would be anything impermissible at all. Unless, of course, you have somehow fooled yourself into believing that *you* are good and therefore are an acceptable standard by which all others are to be measured. Such is the sin of which our LORD speaks.

“Be merciful,” Jesus says, *“just as your FATHER also is merciful.”* But this you cannot do. You love yourself far too much. Certainly, your love of your neighbor falls far short of your love of self. Even now, if truth be told, as you sit there in your pew, you feel pretty good about yourself as though you are doing a pretty good job with the Law of God. Much like the Pharisee in the temple, you pray honoring yourself because you are not like other men. However, this is not love for your neighbor and it certainly is not the mercy CHRIST here commands.

Of course, you know this. You also know that the sum of God’s Law is that *“...You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”* You also know that love demands mercy and mercy demands love. These two, love and mercy, are two sides to the same coin. They are of one substance and cannot be separated.

Yes, you know these things, and so you know as well that you fall far short of the Law. Even if you work hard at convincing yourself that you are more than you are, better than you are, holier than you are, like the rich young man who inquired what more he could do to receive salvation, or those men who would have stoned the adulterous woman, you know something is lacking in yourself. Therefore, who among you is worthy of casting the first stone?

When we forget the mercy of God our FATHER which He so graciously poured out upon us in the Blood of His SON, JESUS CHRIST, when we sit in judgment of our neighbors, we despise the grace of God so freely given, and set up in its place our own standard, making ourselves judge, jury, and jailor.

Beware! *“For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”* Therefore, pray our FATHER in Heaven to change your heart that when the Day of Judgment

arrives the measure you receive will not condemn you; for the measure with which you condemn your fellow brothers and sisters will be measured back to you; the mercy you receive will be defined by the mercy you give. Be warned then, that you do not receive evil for evil, but mercy for mercy, *“given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over... put into your bosom.”*

Therefore, pray and repent! To judge where it has not been given you to judge puts you at odds with God, indeed, it puts you in the position of judging God Himself, who wishes all sinners to come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. Truly, it is for this very reason that God took on the flesh of His creation, that in His innocent, suffering, and death, all mankind would be justified. Is your eye evil, therefore, because God is good? Who, then, are you to judge God and His will for all mankind? Does the clay judge the potter? No! Judgment belongs to God alone!

Attend, then, to your own business and stop worrying about your neighbor’s sins; they are not yours to judge. Who are you, sinner, to tell God whom He may save and whom He must condemn? Do not condemn your brother or sister and in so doing condemn yourself. Rather pray that he or she would come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. This is the mercy of God. This is the mercy of which our LORD JESUS speaks and this is the mercy for which He died.

All this does not mean that we are never to judge, but we are to judge righteously only those things which are given to us to judge. Thus, you are to judge teaching, whether it be true or false, as well as false teachers and heretics. You are not to keep company with outwardly evil and unrepentant people. You are to separate yourself from unbelievers and idolaters. These you are to judge, but not in self-righteousness, not with arrogance and hypocrisy, and certainly not as though you are without sin. *“For we ought not to condemn, or insult, but to admonish; we ought not to slander, but to counsel; not to attack in arrogance, but to correct with gentleness and affection. For it is not this other person that you are giving over to severe punishment, not sparing him when there was need to pass sentence on his faults, but your own self.”* (St. John Chrysostom)

You are a child of God Most High who out of love and mercy has redeemed you and lifted you from your own filth, raising you from death and the grave with the precious Blood of His SON, forgiving your sins, and giving unto you eternal life.

Therefore, do not cheapen and despise such a wonderful and precious gift, freely given and freely received, with such hypocrisy. Rather, love as you have been loved, give as you have been given, *“be merciful just as your FATHER also is merciful,”* that when you stand before the Judgment Bench on that great and final Day of our LORD, *“it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over.... For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”*

I know it is hard to be merciful *“just as your FATHER also is merciful.”* Yet, our FATHER in Heaven loves you. Indeed, it is God’s love for you that leads to His response to your very

lack of mercy—that leads Him to be abundantly merciful to you. Indeed, for the joy set before Him, our LORD JESUS endured being stripped of His skin by whips; He endured the agony of death by crucifixion; our God endured being cast into the pit of the tomb, all to gain for you the mercy of His FATHER.

So, you see, your sin is no match for God’s mercy. No matter how hot and high the flames of your sin rise, His font of grace contains more than enough water to douse the hellish fire that threatens to consume you.

For the love of God is not like your love. The love of God does not seek out only the loveable, the likable; God’s love does not seek only those who will return His love. Nor does God seek out and show His love only to those who first love Him.

God loves you even before He finds you because God loved you even before He created you; God has loved you as His own even from the very foundation of the world. Indeed, it is His love that created you in the first place, that formed you in your mother’s womb, that re-created you in the womb of the Church, giving you new birth in the blessed and holy waters of Baptism, and it is this very same love of God that continues to love you even when you are unfaithful, mean, spiteful, and even unmerciful.

You see, our God does things that we men and women may never understand. As it is written, *“How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!”* And again, *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are My ways your ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.”*

God’s mind is far beyond our feeble comprehension. Thus, while men and women in search of a spouse look for a man or woman who is attractive and of good reputation, a man or woman who will first love them, this is not the way of our God.

Our God is different from men. He has loved and died for us while we were yet His enemies. Our capacity to love more than ourselves, to love God and neighbor, resides in the fact that God first loved us. Indeed, unlike us, He searched out the ugliest, the most mean-spirited, deformed, disease-infested spouse whose life was littered with impurity, infidelity, and every manner of wickedness. This Woman God has made His Bride. He washed Her clean of every filth, completely forgiving Her every sin. He has clothed and adorned Her with His righteousness and pronounced Her beautiful and chaste. This Woman for whom God does this—she is you and me. She is the Church.

Just as God’s love is not like our love, neither is His mercy like our mercy. Our FATHER in Heaven did not wait for us to ask for mercy before He gave it through the gruesome crucifixion and death of JESUS, His SON. And when, through the preaching of God’s Law, you came to recognize your need for mercy, He did not measure the sincerity of your confession, nor did He weigh your every word to mete out His judgment. He simply pronounced the Absolution

which is already yours in the Waters of Holy Baptism. He continues to feed you with His mercy in the very Body and Blood He sacrificed on the altar of the Cross for your forgiveness.

All this with a Word. With His Word, God bespeaks you righteous. So no, God did not forgive you your trespasses as you forgive others; Heaven forbid! He did not make you beg. He did not demand a public apology; He simply forgave you, even before you were aware that you needed to be forgiven.

Do not ask why, simply say *“Amen.”* For what else can one say to the love and mercy of God except, *“Amen, amen!”* that is, *“Yes, yes, it shall be so!”*?

With His mercy He removes the planks from your eyes and the specks from the eyes of your neighbor, taking them all and nailing them to the bloody wood of His Cross. They are gone, forever—forgiven! In the heat of our Father’s compassion, your failures, your infidelities, your greed, your selfishness, and your mean-spiritedness all melt like ice. You are made clean. You are made pure. You are a beloved child of God. Nothing and no one means more to Him than do you. And nothing and no one can change that. For JESUS has been judged so that you are acquitted. JESUS was condemned so you are justified and declared righteous in the eyes of God our FATHER.

Like a good measure of grain, pressed down, shaken together, and running over into your bosom, even so, JESUS, the Grain made heavenly Bread, came down from heaven in good measure, was pressed down by your sins, shaken together in His Passion. This Grain is now given into your bosom, that is, into your mouth, as the Grain that has become Bread and the Bread that has become Body, that you are filled with the very mercy of God. *“Take, eat, this is His merciful Body, given for you.”* *“Take, drink, this is His merciful Blood, shed for you—completely for you.”* Oh, taste and see that the LORD, your God, is merciful—perfectly, eternally, abundantly, merciful to you.

Come to the table prepared for you, to be fed on our Lord’s Words of mercy, *“I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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