



Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Lent | March 11, 2018

We Are God's Handiwork

By Mary Katharine Deeley

My husband likes to photograph the beauty of creation. He has gotten very good at it, sometimes zooming in to focus on the details of individual flowers or butterflies, other times zooming out to capture the glory of a waterfall, a mountain lake, or the fiery clouds billowing from one of Hawaii's volcanoes into a night sky full of stars.

Several of his photos decorate my office walls. He's justifiably proud of each. They're the work of his artist's eye and hand, so he signs them and takes care to frame them just right.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul calls us God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus—not because we are so amazing (we are, in fact, sinners), but because he loved us.

John's Gospel echoes the sentiment: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." If a human being like my husband can take pleasure in and be justifiably proud of the work of his own hands, then how much more can God love his own handiwork? The answer, of course, is immeasurably more. God loved us enough to give us himself in Christ Jesus, who laid down his life for us though we had done nothing to deserve it.

The photos my husband creates can't thank him or give anything back to him, but it is in our power to thank our Creator, who filled us with life and redeemed us through Jesus' death and resurrection.

Today, try to love someone else a little more out of sheer gratitude that God so loves you. +

A Word From Pope Francis

Jesus shows a particular predilection for those who are wounded in body and in spirit: the poor, the sinners, the possessed, the sick, the marginalized. Thus, he reveals himself as a doctor both of souls and of bodies, the Good Samaritan of man. He is the true Savior: Jesus saves, Jesus cures, Jesus heals.

—Angelus, February 8, 2015



Sunday Readings

2 Chronicles 36:14–16, 19–23

Early and often the LORD...sent his messengers to them, for he had compassion on his people.

Ephesians 2:4–10

For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus.

John 3:14–21

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- Do I need to repent from whatever attitudes or actions distance me from that love?
- Do I have any unspoken belief that, in some way, I am unlovable?



Imitating God's Powerful Mercy

By Kathy Coffey

"Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy."

—Matthew 5:7

When words aren't accompanied by actions, they lose power. If we hear someone talking endlessly about mercy but never practicing it, we yawn and turn away. "Don't just tell me; show me!" we protest.

To establish credibility, it is important to note how Jesus shows mercy before he ever mentions it. When we think of how he practiced mercy throughout his life, we remember dramatic cures of desperate people: the centurion's servant, paralytic, or hemorrhaging woman.

But we should also remember the ordinary, daily mercies he practiced as easily as breathing. This resembles the kind of mercy God showers on us. By all accounts, the disciples could be dense. Yet Jesus tolerated their stupid questions, petty feuds, and shameful disloyalty. Rarely did he show annoyance. He never said, "I've been with you this long and you still don't get it?"

Even more mercifully, he calls them his friends and asks them to continue his work on earth. He empowers them to preach the good news, cherish the poor, and cure the sick. Without a word about their miserable failings, he sends them on

a mission to be his witness throughout the earth. That is copious mercy.

Perhaps the last beatitude should be, "Blessed are those who live the beatitudes, for they bring the teaching alive." How do we learn to be merciful? Most agree that with charity, they'd rather be on the giving end. It's painful to receive, perhaps because humans often mix condescension with charity.

But mercy—ah, that's a different story. When we know we've goofed and squirm with tension awaiting the penalty, mercy comes like a cool breeze in the heat. Our self-defenses and excuses crumble with relief. In a burst of goodwill, we vow never to do that again or be so stupid.

Holding Back

And what of those who act mercifully? Here it's harder to be on the giving end. It's so tempting to "teach 'em a lesson they'll never forget," to assess the full payment. Just once, we have our coworkers, our opponent, our spouse, or our child in a position where we could demonstrate our power to pulverize. One who has made a mistake is—quite literally—"at our mercy."

And yet the merciful hold back. They relax into the image of a compassionate God, saying, "Let God take care of the punishment." Or they remember how often they've been in a jam, when others have shown mercy.

For centuries Christians have prayed, "Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy."

Jesus rarely showed annoyance.

And God has given us mercy that far surpasses what we deserve.

God's Unending Mercy

Each morning, we receive the gift of twenty-four new, unexplored hours. We are given health, breath, and energy. God calls us to nurture the next generation, to make the world more beautiful through art, music, and literature. Furthermore, he gives us remarkable gifts: abilities to compute, meditate, inspire, heal, and teach. In a continuous flow of grace, God overlooks our worst errors and failures.

We may recognize God's mercy in a disaster narrowly averted, a diagnosis of "benign" instead of "malignant," events that come together to save our necks. After years of praying "Kyrie eleison," we can respond to this divine outpouring with a mercy that mirrors God's.

If God showers us daily with his mercies, we can be more tolerant of the slow coworker, resist the urge to lambaste a careless child, and show restraint when we discover the mistake of a friend. Then we all become richer in mercy. +



Lord, you are the source of love,
peace, and justice in the world.
Help me to live in communion
with you and all people.

From *Mindful Meditations for
Every Day of Lent and Easter*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 12–17, 2018

Mon. Lenten Weekday:
Is 65:17–21 / Jn 4:43–54


Tue. Lenten Weekday:
Ez 47:1–9, 12 / Jn 5:1–16

Wed. Lenten Weekday:
Is 49:8–15 / Jn 5:17–30

Thu. Lenten Weekday:
Ex 32:7–14 / Jn 5:31–47

Fri. Lenten Weekday:
Wis 2:1a, 12–22 / Jn 7:1–2, 10, 25–30

Sat. Lenten Weekday:
Jer 11:18–20 / Jn 7:40–53

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