**“Repentance, Mercy, and Forgiveness”**

All our readings today point us to these words, ***“Repentance, Mercy, and Forgiveness.”*** Repentance, Mercy, and forgiveness go together. One cannot happen without the other. Without repentance, there is no mercy. Without mercy there is no forgiveness. Mercy and forgiveness by God are always there for us to receive. All He ask of us is, to do the same for our neighbor. It is when we do these that we will have joy in our lives. Forgiveness comes by the grace of God.

Repentance comes from being genuinely sorry for our sins and having profound desire to sin no more. When we repent of evil desires, we would be led by the Holy Spirit to have mercy and forgive those who have wronged us. Instead of anger and hatred, we should turn to God’s compassion rejecting jealousy and quarreling which leads to death. God whose words are unchanging and who is all merciful will forgive us our sins when we forgive our neighbor.

In our first reading, through Prophet Sirach, God warned those who are angry with their neighbor and those who are bent on taking revenge on those who are unjust to them. Anger leads to hate and hate leads to evil thoughts which leads to revenge. Anger in itself is not bad for us. It is when it turns to hate that it becomes a sin. We could look at the story of Cain and Abel to try to understand what God is trying to teach us through Prophet Sirach.

When Abel’s sacrifice was pleasing to God and Cain’s sacrifice was not, Cain became dejected and angry at his brother. God warned Cain to turn away from his anger because the devil would lead him to hate his brother and he would commit grave sin. Cain refused to listen to God. Cain’s anger turned into hate. His hate for his brother turned into murder of his brother. God desires all of us to have the opportunity to repent so He can shower us with His mercy and forgiveness.

In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he reminded them and us that any baptized Christian live for Christ and die for Christ and that Jesus is the only one who was born to die. When He was resurrected, he gave us who are born to live the opportunity to have eternal life if we obey His commandments. When we live for self, we will be in pain and feel hurt when others fail us. If we do not let go of the hurt, we will be miserable and unhappy.

In other words, if we live for ourselves as pagans or atheist do, we would not obey God’s commandment of mercy and forgiveness of our neighbor. Happiness is what we all desire. Forgiveness and being forgiven leads to happiness. When we are forgiven we are happy and when we forgive, we and those we forgive would be happy.

As Jesus said somewhere in the Scripture, we must be like little children in other to get to heaven. Children could be fighting over a toy in one minute and the next minute, they would be hugging one another. Little children have short memories. Their friendship with each other means more to them than their toy or ego. They have the capacity to put aside their pain and hurt and forgive one another without being asked.

Our Gospel reading is about repentance, mercy, and forgiveness. God is like the king who forgave the huge debt of his servant after the servant repented and asked for mercy. It was a debt the servant could never repay. This is contrary to how humans act. It seems the more wealth people have, the more they demand that every debt must be paid in full. Wiping out the debt of the servant is a symbol of forgiveness.

We just remembered the horror of what happened in our Country some few years ago on 9/11. It was a devilish work that has changed our world probably forever. Because of the horror, we can no longer travel by air as freely as we used to. We go through check points, and we and our luggage are searched thoroughly at the airport so we can feel safe. The horrible experience reminds me of a similar story that happened to the family of a young boy.

A few years ago, an eleven year old boy was getting ready for school. As he was getting dressed, he heard over the news that “United Air Lines flight 629 with forty-four people aboard, had exploded and crashed.” The news ran chills of fear over his body. He ran downstairs to find his grandmother who was talking quietly with their parish priest. The young boy said, “Mom and dad were on that plane, weren’t they?” You see, someone had placed a bomb on the plane.

At school later that morning, the students at the parish school asked for a prayer service. The priest asked the boy if that was okay with him and his brothers. The boy agreed and to the surprise of the priest said, “Would they please say a prayer for the man who killed my mom and dad?” This young boy acted in the face of pain and adversity like our Lord did on the cross when He prayed to His Father to forgive those who mercilessly brutalized and killed Him on the cross.

 We are reminded daily at Mass, of the act of Jesus on the cross and the forgiving act of the young boy as we pray our Lord’s Prayer. In that prayer we ask God to forgive us our sins as we forgive others who sin against us. God makes it clear right after the prayer that He will not forgive us our sins unless we do likewise to our neighbor.

Forgiveness should be extended out of genuine love to those who offend us. Like God, we should desire to have unity and peace among each other. Forgiveness is a sign of unity and peace. Jesus on the night He was to die, was in deep prayer to His Father. Jesus also prayed for us to be united as He and the father are one. He prayed that our unity with Him and each other would be real as each part of a body is united to form a whole person.

So Jesus left us for all time, the gift of His body and blood in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the effective sign of the unity of the Church as the mystical body of Christ. Before we receive the Eucharist, we hear the minster say “The body of Christ.” These words refers to Christ in the Eucharist and to Christ in us. Christ body makes us one body. To be true to the meaning of the Eucharist, we must forgive and love one another as God loves and forgive us.

As we come to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, let us ask for His grace to have a merciful and forgiving heart.