

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend's second reading from St. Paul's letter to the Romans, speaks to us of how God "**delivered all to disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all**" (Romans 11:32). While remembering, of course, that this is not an invitation to sin, it is a great CONSOLATION! I can't tell you how many times people have come to me discouraged because they sinned; and not only that they sinned, but that they freely chose to sin! How many times has this been my story?!!

It's like when Esau, being famished after a long day, comes in seeking food. His brother Jacob is making some red pottage to eat, so Esau asks for some. Jacob gives it to him at the price of his birthright (in the ancient near eastern culture, the firstborn's inheritance would have been larger than any of the other children's) (see Genesis 25:27-34). *Honestly!* To sell the birthright for some soup! What was he thinking?!!!

Yet we do this all the time by our sin. And, to add to this, very often *we know what we are doing!* We know what we are doing is wrong. We feel it in our soul. Yet, we still choose to disobey God. Maybe it is because we think we know better. Maybe we're feeling empty, and we don't trust that God really can fill us up (in an even better way than anything else in the created world!). Whatever the reason, we sell the gift of God – our birthright as His beloved children – by our rebellion and disobedience, for pittance.

The letter to the Romans is Good News for us. God desires to have mercy on us! He wants us to realize that we are truly weak and broken, but that He is our strength, and He can make us NEW (really! **NEW!**). We have great opportunities in this time of mercy to receive His mercy. The only thing that keeps us from receiving His mercy is if we refuse to ask for it.

We can refuse to ask for mercy because we don't think sin is really sin, if we refuse to acknowledge that we have sinned, if we refuse to take responsibility for our actions. Then, we limit God's mercy, because we say we don't want it or need it. God respects our free will – even unto Hell. He will not force relationship upon us; He will not force His mercy on us if we don't want it, He will not force us to come into Heaven.

The other time we don't ask for mercy is when we DO have a real sense of our sin. We see how bad it is ... and we don't think God can forgive us, that He wants to forgive us, that we deserve to be forgiven. **This wounds Jesus' Heart to the core!** *He longs to pour out His mercy upon us!* As Pope Francis has said, God does not grow tired of forgiving us; it is we who grow tired of asking for forgiveness. Nobody is without sin. Too many of us choose sin, knowing it is sin, yet God does not hold a grudge. He loves us still. It doesn't make sense. It isn't logical. It is the love of a Father who refuses to give up on His beloved, yet wayward child. All God wants is for us to come to Him, to trust in His love and mercy, to receive forgiveness.

To receive His forgiveness means we have to do something hard, though: we have to forgive ourselves. This can be one of the hardest things to do. It does not give God any glory for us to hold our sinful actions against ourselves. Our weaknesses, our failures, our sins do NOT make up who we are. We are the sum of the Father's love for us. As the song "Good, Good Father" says: "And I'm loved by You; it's who I am." At the core of our identity is not our sinfulness, our weakness, our disordered desires, but that I AM LOVED BY GOD.

May this truly be our hope today: that God IS merciful! That He longs more than anything to forgive us if we but repent of our sins (recognize our sins offend God, and turn away from them), and entrust ourselves into God's mercy.