



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's readings are full of encouragement from the Lord. In the second reading, St. Paul tells us that

God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ (Ephesians 2:4-5)

This is the beauty of our faith: we believe in God's incredible mercy bringing us to life! Just a quick reminder, though: in order to receive His mercy, we need to recognize we *need* mercy. So, if you're playing the relativistic mind game of today's culture, saying you never sin, and so *you don't need mercy* – don't worry, you won't get it. Recognizing, though, that we are so inexcusably broken, we can cry out to our God, clinging to His mercy... and we *will* receive it! There is no sin too great that it is too much for Jesus. There are no sins too small and hidden to escape His merciful hands, if we but throw ourselves into His arms and trust in His mercy.

And that's an important point – trust. St. Faustina recounts how Jesus told her:

Encourage the souls with whom you come in contact to trust in My infinite mercy. Oh, how I love those souls who have complete confidence in Me – I will do everything for them. (*Diary 294*)

Do we trust in God's mercy? Do we really? So much of our view of God is skewed by our own experience of tainted love. Instead of recognizing the true and selfless love of God, we focus on the broken and conditional love that we have experienced. So many of us learned that we are loved when we are good, but when we are bad we are punished. While our parents probably still loved us through the punishment, many times we didn't hear that love nor did we feel it the same way as when we were good and being rewarded.

Unfortunately, we transfer that experience over to God. We think (maybe subconsciously) that we need to earn God's love. We think He will abandon us when we are bad. We may even think that when we *feel* distant from God, that He really is distant, and so doesn't love us. How many times have I heard, "God must be sick of hearing from me"? That type of language points to a lack of trust in God's overwhelming, unwearying, passionate love for us! God NEVER tires of being with and hearing from His children!

In the Gospel today, we hear one of the most famous Scripture passages from John 3:16:

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.

Do you get it?! God **LOVED** the world – you and me! He doesn't hate us. He doesn't tolerate us. He doesn't put up with us. He **LOVES** us! He loves us so much, He died for us.

That's everything! That's the heart of the Gospel message!

All that's left is for us to respond to that incredible love and mercy. How do we respond? Trusting in Him, by repenting of our sins and believing in His unending love.

I began Lent by reminding us that every temptation, and, therefore, every sin, comes from a distrust of God. We are invited to trust that He really does love us, He really is merciful. May we have eyes to see God's hand in our lives, even in the struggles and trials. When we fail, may we throw ourselves in trust into the open arms of our loving God and Father.