

Second Sunday of Easter

Year A, 2026

Acts 2:42-47

1 Pt 1:3-9

Ps 118

Jn 20:19-31

His mercy endures forever

The collect, that is, the opening prayer, for today's Mass, begins by calling upon God as "God of everlasting mercy."

In the responsorial psalm, three times we are enjoined to say and declare: "*His mercy endures forever.*" God's *chesed*, his lovingkindness, a word sometimes translated as mercy, came to the psalmist when he "*was hard pressed and was falling.*" It was then, when he was in hardship, when he had fallen into hard times, that "*the Lord helped*" him.

In our second reading, from 1 Peter, the apostle blesses "*the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*" for "*his great mercy,*" a great mercy that comes to us "*through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*" It is by the resurrection of Jesus that we are given "*a new birth to a living hope,*" an "*imperishable, undefiled, and unfading*" inheritance in heaven.

Mercy, then, is one of the great themes of this second Sunday of Easter, sometimes called Divine Mercy Sunday, when we reflect on God's mercy toward us. There is a refrain in scripture that we first encounter in the book of Exodus: "*The Lord God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love and fidelity*" (34:6). That same phrase, with a few variations, is then repeated over and over

again: in the book of Numbers (14:18); in Nehemiah (9:17); in the Psalms (86:15, 103:8, 145:8); in the book of Wisdom (15:1); in Joel (2:13), in Jonah (4:2): *“you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in mercy and truth.”*

As we contemplate and celebrate God’s merciful love toward us, his lovingkindness, his *chesed*, we must equally reflect on how we make use of the divine mercy shown toward us. In another psalm (116:12), we read: *“How can I repay the Lord for all the great good done for me?”* One answer: by being merciful to others, as God has been merciful to me, with a generous heart and hand.

Isn’t this the point of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-36)? The good Samaritan, a foreigner, becomes a model of compassion and mercy as out of his own resources he takes care of a poor Jewish man, whose own spiritual leaders see him in need, but pass by him on the opposite side of the road. The one who treated the poor man with mercy is the one who fulfilled the law. The others – scholars of the law, enforcers of the law, preachers of the law – are in fact law-breakers, and to their shame, a foreigner fulfills the law of lovingkindness, when they refuse to do so. It is right, then, that Jesus concludes that parable by telling his hearers that they must *“go and do likewise,”* in imitation of mercy shown by the noble and generous Samaritan.

Jesus teaches through parables. Mercy, though, is not a lesson that we learn willingly. We are slow to understand and hard of heart.

Let's be honest with ourselves. We, practicing Catholics all, we're much more like the two spiritual leaders in the parable than we're like the good Samaritan himself. We don't want to stop and tend to some stranger in need, even if he is our neighbor. We don't want to open our wallets to pay for his needs, even if he is in dire straits. We want to ignore the problem, walk way, cross over to the other side of the road, have someone else deal with the one in need, or even better, just make him disappear.

So stingy with our mercy, yet we want God to bless us with his mercy. Why should God give to us, when we're so unwilling to give to others? There's another parable about that, remember? The parable of the unforgiving servant (Mt 18:21-34) who was forgiven the huge debt he owed to his king, but then refused to forgive a pittance owed to him. It didn't turn out well for him in the end.

Mercy can't be something we just talk about, something we just receive. Mercy must be something we do, something we give. If not, we're blaspheming. No Christian can rightly pray— as one public figure, a professed Christian nationalist, recently did — for “overwhelming violence of action against those who deserve no mercy” (Hegseth prayer). Most of us are not spiritually deranged enough to say something like that out loud, but I am worried that by our actions or, more to the point, by our inaction, we may very well give witness that we do believe that there are some people who are not worthy of mercy, some people from whom we may exempt ourselves from the duty to mercy.

Two questions: Who would such a person be? and: Would you cast that first stone (Jn 8:7)?

Some people are very proud to announce that ours is a Christian nation. Judging by its fruits, I disagree. You can talk theory and history all you want. It is all *“vanity and a chasing after the wind”* (Eccl 1:14). Focus rather on practice, on results, on fruits. Tout the spiritual works of mercy all you want, but failure in the corporal works of mercy points to a spiritual failure at the grandest scale.

Never mind the country. Let’s get a little more local. Lafayette is statistically one of the most religiously practicing areas of the whole country. It is a community with lots of Christians, lots of Catholics, but I’m not yet convinced that this is a Christian community.

Much in the local news this past week is the proposed ordinance circulating in the City Council to criminalize sleeping out of doors in public spaces. It is meant to target the homeless: after a warning to decamp, a \$500 fine and/or up to thirty days in jail. This seems to me the exact opposite of Christian mercy. To me it seems like cruelty.

Let’s think about this: I’m homeless, as in *“no where to lay my head”* (Mt 8:20). Where am I supposed to sleep, to live, to eat? I’ve lost pretty much everything, even my dignity, my sense of worth in the eyes of others who, if they wanted, could help me. If I had \$500, I wouldn’t be sleeping in parks, on benches, in tents on empty lots

and abandoned spaces, so how do you think I'm going to pay your fine when I'm scrambling for money just to eat or to wash myself? The Catholic men's shelter? It's full most of the time, and the other church shelters have closed, state and national politicians have cut off funding sources. Where am I supposed to go, when I have nowhere to go? You want to send me to jail? Thirty days in jail? The jails are full. Is my having the misfortune to be poor and without housing a really a crime, a crime, worthy of locking me up for, alongside violent felons? And now that you've arrested me, how am I supposed to get back on my feet and find a job with that on my record?

This ordinance is not meant to be a measure of mercy for the homeless. Going back to the parable of the Good Samaritan, it's meant to mollify those who don't want to even have to walk by someone in distress. Not content to pass by on the opposite side of the road, they want those in distress to be relocated, fined, locked up, moved out of sight. There is no mercy in such things.

I'm glad our city council members are hearing a lot of pushback against this proposed ordinance, which hasn't yet been introduced. I encourage you to contact city council members to speak against this proposal, which is simply irrational. It will do nothing to address the problem of homelessness in our community. It will only criminalize people who have no other choice, nowhere to go.

What could be done, then? Why not, as an effort to be merciful to the most vulnerable and neglected among us, why not, to become a Christian community in fact and not just in word, why not construct and fund a parish emergency housing shelter that can house the homeless of Lafayette parish while connecting them to the resources and services necessary for their well being and that of our community?

Now before you object, please note that in 2020 Lafayette Parish constructed, and continues to fund, a nearly \$9 million no-kill animal shelter with funds from the Public Health and Safety millage, which was renewed by voters this past November. So we have the will and resources to help animals, but not people?

I'm very glad and proud of our new Animal Shelter and Care Center, but I'd be prouder to have a Human Shelter and Care Center that can cooperate with and complement the good work already being done for the homeless through organizations like Catholic Charities of Acadiana and the Acadiana Regional Coalition on Homelessness.

Homelessness is a societal problem, the kind of problem that is rightly the purview of local and state government. And yet, local and state government leaders are too often tempted to exonerate themselves of their responsibilities in this regard by trying to pass off the burdens of this necessary social action to churches and non-profits. But this, too, is an evasion of mercy. If local government

can provide an animal shelter – and it should, this is humane – then it can provide a human shelter – and we should, for this is human.

There is so much more that I could say about this, but I think I've made the point I wanted to make. We cannot serve both God and mammon. We cannot love our money or our pets more than we love our people. There is no mercy for those who will show no mercy. But *"blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy"* (Mt 5:7).

Teach me, Lord, the demands of your precepts
and I will keep them to the end.

Train me to observe your law,
to keep it with my heart (Ps 119:33-34).

For it is mercy that you desire, and not sacrifice (Mt 9:13). Teach us, Lord, the true meaning of these words, and call us to your righteousness. Lord Jesus, risen on this Easter day, we beg you to show us your mercy and love and grant us your salvation. Amen.