

I would like to thank you all once again for receiving and welcoming me to speak to you. What appropriate readings for me to come talk to you about. The works of mercy in relation to the Catholic Worker, but also for us as a community. It is easy to talk about the works of mercy and the importance of them, as the point is quite clear in the readings.

Do we want to be viewed as sheep or goats? The left or on the right?

I always have a hard time thinking about how some are made worthy as others will not be. As always, I believe we cannot fathom or begin to understand what God's love is about or to what depth. It is humanly impossible to me. We often limit for ourselves and others what God is. We limit who God loves and calls to service and in how we worship. When we look and acknowledge all is from God our creator how small minded of us to harbor the thoughts that we are not worthy of the creators love.

Now that is not saying that we should not be accountable for our actions, but do we react and behave out of fear or out of this thought that God loves us so much? Out of fear or the possibility that we, you and I could be the reflection of God's love...in all our imperfection, a reflection of Gods love. It is in this idea and thought that worshiping a God through our fears is like worshiping a bully.

But to worship this God of the most awesome and unconditional love is what it truly should be about for us.

How do we navigate both messages? So many of the stories contradict but no matter what the story is, what we should be sure and confident and support each other in is the God of Love. Not the scary Bully, the do it or else mentality. How it must hurt this God of Love to be thought of as a bully when the message is clearly and ultimately that of love.

God even gave us the Christ, the Only Begotten Son, and what did we do to him? This is Love beyond our understanding and comprehension. A love that does not make sense to us. When we are hurt the first thing we often do or feel is to want to hurt back. We often even hurt ourselves. God also instructs us to love, to love even our enemies and sometimes that has to start with ourselves. How many times are we our own worst enemy. How we try to sabotage this love. How many times do we hear you have to start with loving yourself in order to love others. You have to take care of yourself in order to take care of others. So, it is in this... love for God first and then ourselves, that we must begin our journey, and it is a constant process; never ending and never perfect...

So now the works of mercy could be looked at in similar ways. Do we do them out of fear that we will be looked at as the goat or do we do them to reflect this God of love? Do we use our feelings of unworthiness, shame and guilt as a reason to not have to participate. "Oh why bother I am going to just be a goat no matter what I do, I can never be good enough...". Trust me. I question myself right now. Who am I to think I should be standing here in front of you with all my faults. Some who know me well may quickly agree with that. For some people just who I am, a gay man, is enough, without even knowing all else that often pains my soul. But here I am.

We all know how the story goes; one would betray him, another deny...the ones who doubted. They ran when he needed them most. They failed him. They knew him the best and still failed him. Christ still came back for them. This God of love comes back. Trust to believe in the God of mercy and love. Christ who continues to come back and forgive. Many of us won't or can't do this. It is sometimes just too hard for us in our own human state.

Everyone of us miss opportunities everyday to live well and to do what is just or kind. To forgive, to understand and to love those who have hurt us is often too hard. So naturally it is hard for us, as humans, to imagine that kind of love being for real and available to us. We often say our prayers and in them we acknowledge Christ as coming to earth and becoming human. Well it is in this humanness he understands how hard it is and in how much pain we all are in. How confusing and complex it all seems and almost impossible at times. It is because of his humanness that he understands how weak and broken and sacred we are.

If the apostles had stayed awake in the garden they would have seen a glimpse of the human Christ that understands and forgives us. They would have seen the scared, lonely and fearful Christ, the broken Christ, the Christ who was begging his creator, "take this cup away from me" I do not want it. The Christ on the verge of failure himself.

It is in our most broken moments that we are closest to God. It is in the midst of our confusion, shame, guilt and failures that we are closest to our unconditionally loving God. So do not be afraid for even the goats will find their way to God and God to them. It is in the works of mercy and doing them with love that God is looking for us to reflect and share with the world.

I ask us to look at the cross. I have asked this many times before of others. Does it look comfortable, easy, or convenient? If your life is all of these you might be needing to look at your life. It is in our excess that we typically give, but would we be able to give our last piece of bread away if needed? Sure, as hard as it can be, it also can be very easy to give and perform the works of mercy because of our privileges and class. For many it might be very easy to run to the store and buy food and beverages or clothes for someone to wear; to buy a plot to bury our dead. But is this all God expects from us? Easy quick fixes to go off after and feel good about, saying "I am done now".

This reading in many ways also speak of justice. Not just a quick fix but trying our best and offering Justice with the food and drink. Justice with the shelter and opportunities all deserve. Who is really our neighbor? The challenge of Christianity is to love those who are different from us. Not just other Christians and people we find easy to understand or relate to. Yes, we can do the works of mercy but does that not also mean working for social justice and peace?

Oh now things can get a bit more uncomfortable, when we want to work for equality and justice and peace, there lies risk.

Risk of being misunderstood, alienated, scorned, viewed as unpatriotic, a trouble maker. If we do not have justice we can not have peace and if we have no peace then the vicious cycle of disparity, suffering, hunger, thirst, crimes and violence, lack of shelter, and death begins once again. Over and over again!

So it is not about just trying to fix the immediate which of course is good and necessary but to look at the causes like dominance, greed, and power.

We are not to just look at the problems that lead to injustice but to act also. Christ was looked at as a trouble maker, confronting nonviolently the powers that be. He was labeled, imprisoned, persecuted, and the death penalty was used against him in an attempt to silence him. The crucifixion of Christ continues today in blaming our poor, the sick, the mentally ill, the prisoner, all those affected by wars and violence, and even the peacemakers.

When we work to help those that Christ has asked us to, we take the risk and the possibility that the table will be turned; instead of visiting the prisoner we may become that prisoner. Caring for the sick may make us sick. Many of your own comforts and place in society could change.

Hans and Sophie Sholl went from being students in college to the gallows of Nazi Germany because they spoke up and lived out their faith. It is the long loneliness that Dorothy Day talked about. Living the gospels is not meant to be easy and often it will be lonely. So I ask you again to envision the cross and in carrying your own you may also find the strengths to help carry each others.

There are so many ways to do the works of mercy, some seem grander than others but it is something not to be weighed, but just valued. It is not a competition. We all have something to give and with everyone trying to do their part together we as a whole, a community, can become the reflection of the loving God.

When one is weak, another may be strong and vice a versa and it is in conquering our fears together and conquering the idea of this bully or harsh God that we will be able to perform the works of mercy and reflect the loving God. The God who never fails to come back for us, the sheep and goats alike.

Most often we think of the disadvantaged as those who need us and what we should try to do is look at each of us struggling in one way or another. To share in the idea that we all are wounded and in need. Not just the person on the corner with the sign or the person in which their needs are obvious but maybe the person next to you right now. Think of how the Pharisees and priests needed forgiving, healing and love as much as anyone else.

Not one of us is better than the next. It might appear so on the outside but we all have our crosses, our faults, our brokenness. In no way minimizing those that are obviously struggling, but at some time we all need the works of mercy in one way or another. Once again most often it is in our excess that we give and reach out, but sometimes we don't even realize that in our own brokenness and fragility that we still have something to offer... to be the reflection of the loving God... A continual exchange of forgiveness healing and love. To love God enough to make ourselves vulnerable.

To make ourselves vulnerable to our creator takes courage;

Courage to recognize our brokenness.

God never fails, abandons or denies us and in our broken moments God is right there; right there to give us the strength and love we attempt to share with each other...Let us pray: Lord, give bread to the hungry and for those of us with bread, a thirst and hunger for justice! Be well and God bless you.