

+4th Sunday of Lent (B)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
March 14, 15, 2015

During the past week as I prepared for the weekend, I was reminded of how realistically Hispanic art often portrays the crucified Jesus. I think my first exposure to this was in the late 70's during a trip to Bolivia with Fr. Leon Connolly. All their crucifixes had lots of blood marks painted on the hands, feet, face and body of Jesus. I remember also that I didn't much like them. I was used to our own much tamer images of Jesus crucified. The Hispanic art was really jarring! Maybe the closest thing we have seen of this in our culture and time was in Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ*. And I didn't like that any better. But maybe Hispanics do this because they experience more of the poverty and struggle of life ... and maybe those in our culture who are caught in the webs of poverty, hunger and homelessness would prefer a more realistic crucified Jesus, even a bloody one as well. Yet there is no doubt that such an image of Jesus crucified can make you stop and ask why ... and the only satisfying answer that I can think of to that question has to be because of the mercy of God.

We hear about this mercy of God in all of today's Scriptures:

- God uses Cyrus, a Persian king, not a Jew himself, to express his mercy by allowing the exiles of Israel to return home. God is so merciful that He even has Cyrus begin the building of a new Temple for the returned exiles.
- in the gospel, John is clear to say that God sent His own Son not to condemn us but to save us. Even though we often neglect God, and take advantage of God, even at times USE God, God nonetheless extends saving grace ... out of his great mercy.
- and, of course, St. Paul in today's 2nd Scripture says so clearly:
“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 – by grace you have been saved-..... for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God....”

We have a great crucifix here – walking into our church it is the first image that grabs me. What does it say to me?

What do I do with such great mercy on my behalf?

How do I feel as a recipient of such great mercy?

I certainly don't ask myself these questions often enough, but when I do I thought, how I would answer them. I looked for something to express my answer and found a couple of things to share with you: one is a short reading, the other a song.

The reading is from Michael Quoist, Prayers:

The die is cast, Lord; I can no longer forget you.
In a moment you seized me,
In a moment you conquered me.
My doubts were swept away,
My fears dispelled.
For I recognized you without seeing you.
I felt you without touching you,
I understood you without hearing you.
Marked by the fire of your love, I can no longer forget you.
Now I know that you are there, close to me, and I work in peace
beneath your gaze of love.

The reading continues a bit, but I must say I struggle with the sentiments expressed in these closing lines ... I wish they were more true for me than they are

I no longer know what it is to make an effort to pray.
I just lift my eyes to you and I meet yours,
And we understand one another. All is light, all is peace.

And then the song:

How great are You, Lord
How great is Your mercy
How great are the things
That You have done for me.
How great are You, Lord
Your loving kindness
Is filling my heart as I sing
How great are You, Lord.

How great is Your love
It reaches to the heavens
How great is the heart
That sought and rescued me.

Oh, exalt you for your greatness, for the greatness of your heart, the compassion of your heart, Lord, the love of your heart. Lord, you have shown your heart to us.

O Lord, may we by our words, our actions, and our deeds show your heart to the people we meet, to the people of this earth, this world, to the people of this world we live in, to the people of every nation.

The heart of the Father that loves us and whose love is greater than any earthly love or any other love we can ever know. We bless you for your heart, Lord.

So, What do you first see when you come into church?
What does God's mercy say to you?
What do you do with such great mercy on your behalf?
How do you feel as a recipient of such great mercy?