

Second Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy), B – April 7, 2018 – Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, AL – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 1,050 words

Christ's saving passion, death, and resurrection was more than sufficient to pay the price for all the sins of every human being who would ever exist. And that was so, not in some sort of abstract way – as if, let's say, Father presented Jesus with the total balance due and that's it, instead of an itemized statement; no, the Catechism reminds us that he knew each one of us personally and suffered for each one of us personally.¹ In a way that we cannot even begin to fathom, Jesus knew exactly what he was dying for, in perfect and excruciating detail. Every single sin that you and I have ever committed or will commit, he has already paid the price for. In other words, Jesus died for all. In our theology we call this the “objective redemption”.

We know, however, that his salvation is not automatic. What he accomplished for all has to be applied to each individually. This is what we call the “subjective redemption”. Through baptism we are first redeemed – through confession that redemption is renewed. Our salvation is not a one-time event but is something that develops throughout our lives. Sometimes we lose it; we must never take it for granted. Each of us has not only, as St. Paul says, to work out our salvation with “fear and trembling”,² but also pray to persevere in God's grace until death. In fact, that gift that we seek is called the “grace of final perseverance”; whenever we pray to St. Joseph, patron saint of a good and holy death, we effectively ask for that very grace.

The subjective redemption, or the gift of salvation applied to each person individually, connects with both this Sunday's gospel and the theme of Divine Mercy. Christ breathes on the apostles, giving them a new gift of the Spirit so that they may forgive sins committed after baptism. They themselves would have been baptized at some point by the Lord, subsequently experiencing their own weakness in spite of the gift that they had received. We need only think of Peter, who swore that he would never deny Jesus, but then did so and regretted it bitterly.³ The apostles knew the reality of human weakness and sin very well and very personally – and now the Lord astonishes them by giving them the power to forgive the sins of others!

This, indeed, is what we might call a paradox of the Lord's mercy: the power over sin and death flowing from his resurrection is so great that it can forgive sin even by means of another sinful person! The priest, who represents Christ in the confessional and dispenses his forgiveness, is himself in need of salvation – is himself in need of forgiveness. Just think of how much it humiliates the devil to be defeated by Christ not just directly or through one of the saved angels, like St. Michael, but even through a sinful creature, the priest! Yes, the Lord's mercy is so great and he so eagerly wants us to receive it, that he wills to work even through other sinful creatures to make that happen.

Most priests are taught in seminary that to be a good confessor, they must first be a good penitent. In other words, they must examine their consciences well and make regular use of the sacrament of confession themselves. The practice of regularly humbling himself before the Lord's mercy helps the priest to sympathize more easily with those who approach him; the gratitude he experiences for God's gift given to him in the sacrament makes him all the more eager to share it with others. In this regard, I would encourage you to pray for all priests and ask Jesus to renew them, giving them a greater appreciation of God's mercy in their own lives and a greater zeal to share it with others.

Well, if my own experience of the sacrament of confession is any indication, then it could be that for at least some, there is another prayer for priests that we may need to say on this Mercy

¹ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 478.

² *Philippians* 2:12.

³ Cf. *Matthew* 26:75.

Sunday: a prayer of forgiveness. I have gone to confession for my sins in many different places and even in different languages over the years, and notwithstanding numerous beautiful experiences of God's mercy and love, I had my share of negative experiences also. I understand what it is like for things to not go how they should. And I can certainly sympathize with those who get turned off from the sacrament because of some bad experience. I wish to invite any and all such people to forgive and to come back to the practice of confession.

If I can be of assistance, please let me know. Look at the cross and contemplate Christ's death for our salvation: it was a messy thing. Well, without wanting to downplay or make an excuse for anything wrong that anyone has done, I simply observe that our own redemption can be a messy thing at times. It is not always easy. Things do not always go as smoothly or painlessly as we might like. I guess, thinking about it this way is, in part, what helped me to go back and try again after those times that I felt hurt, offended, or frustrated. God's healing grace will always enable us to follow his plan! Contemplating all that Christ suffered for our salvation, let us take courage and seek out his gift anew!

Yes, Christ died for us all in a most personal way: he knew each of us, including even the most terrible things we would ever do, and he nevertheless offered himself to the Father for all of those things – for all of us – without exception. He so eagerly desires to share his gift personally with us also. And he does that through the ministry of his priests: first through baptism, but then – again and again – through the sacrament of confession. As today's psalm repeated, "His mercy endures forever". Jesus, help me never to take your gift for granted; help me, rather, to seek it out as often and as much as I need it. Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, guide me in the ways of God's mercy, and pray for me: now and at the hour of my death. Amen.