

Order of Malta Retreat
February 5-7, 2016
Bethany Retreat Center

"The Name of God is Mercy"

Talk #3: Mercy and Compassion

I. Introduction:

- a. Church as a Field Hospital is an interesting image
 - i. Not meant to be a place that is avoided
 - 1. Rather: a temporary resting place, in the midst of a battle, for a longer journey to eternal life
 - ii. Three Characteristics of the Field Hospital = Church
 - 1. First Characteristic: Church exists in the midst of combat
 - a. "State of the World" is the battle ground
 - i. Other issues:
 - 1. Income inequality
 - a. Francis' Argentinian experience
 - 2. Globalization
 - a. A two edged sword
 - i. Greater integration and efficiency
 - ii. Loss of Cultural Identity
 - iii. STORY: State of life in Caggiano
 - 3. Lack of Respect for the human person
 - a. Obvious:
 - i. Abortion
 - ii. Euthanasia
 - iii. Poverty
 - b. Less obvious:
 - i. Poor Education
 - ii. Broken Criminal Justice System
 - iii. Racism

b. The state of the world cannot be ignored by the Church for two reasons

i. First: Nature of the Church

1. John 17: 16, ff: "We are in the world but not of the world"

a. We are not Amish for a reason

i. Jesus is the definitive and sole redeemer of the universe

ii. Second: Mission of the Church

1. Mt. 28:19: "Go out and teach all nations....."

a. Our task is to bring healing and incorporation into the mystical body of Christ

i. Missionary Impulse

c. Two wartime functions

i. Twofold: Church needs (a) to go out and engage those who are the combatants and (b) to fight the causes of the combat

ii. First: To attend to the combatants

1. Audience: "wounded"

a. KEY: ALL COMBATANTS

i. Story: Saint John Paul and his assassin

b. Two Question for reflection

i. Which combatants in our lives have we not attended?

ii. Are we the patient or the doctor?

iii. Second: To seek victory in the battle by living our faith, especially the social teachings of the Church

1. Weapons are clear:

a. WITNESS of FAITH

2. Seven key principles (USCCB)
 - a. Life and dignity of the human person
 - b. Call to Family, community
 - c. Responsibility/Subsidiarity
 - d. Option for the poor and vulnerable
 - e. Rights and dignity of workers
 - f. Solidarity
 - g. Care for creation

2. Second Characteristic: First aid = Urgent care

- a. It is not a place for a specialist
 - i. Immediate need: So the soldiers do not die
- b. Dying can take two forms
 - i. Corporeally
 - ii. Spiritually
 1. Key relationship between them, since poverty does not guarantee holiness!!
 - a. For us, the corporal works of mercy only have eternal value if they serve to avoid spiritual death.

3. Third Characteristic: Church must be mobile in nature

- a. Creative tension between institution and charism
 - i. We cannot move quickly with the baggage that we carry
 1. But you can!
 - a. Lay Leadership in its most effective form
 - ii. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION
 1. Relationship between the ordained priesthood and the priesthood of the faithful:
 - a. The ordained ministry exists for the sanctification of the Church so

that its members can sanctify the world

- iii. "Mobility" means more than ministries in the parish. It demands engagement in the world:
 - 1. Creativity
 - 2. Initiative
 - 3. Witness
 - 4. Going where no one else has entry
 - a. Immediate need: So the soldiers do not die

II. Three Qualities of all Compassion

- a. First Quality: Compassion and suffering are intimately intertwined
 - i. Compassion is not possible if we have not first suffered
 - 1. Story in Pope Francis's life
 - a. Exiled after his tenure as Provincial
 - i. Forgave his former superiors
 - 1. His sufferings gave birth to his merciful heart
 - ii. Nature of Suffering:
 - 1. As a depravation, suffering is never a good
 - a. We do not seek suffering for its own sake
 - i. To do so would be masochism
 - b. Suffering must be seen in the larger context of the Kingdom
 - i. Jesus promises to heal us of all sufferings
 - 2. However, suffering is inevitable in life in two respects
 - a. Body: Life is limited and death is inevitable
 - i. Sadly: we live in societal denial of death
 - 1. St. Francis: "Live each day as if it were your last.."
 - b. Spirit: Love demands suffering
 - i. Love: is not solely an emotion

1. It is an act of the will: to effectively will the good of another for the sake of the other
 - a. Story: "this will hurt me more than it hurts you."

3. The real question to ask: How can we suffer well?
 - a. "Suffering well":
 - i. Means to undergo suffering so that (a) our hearts are shattered, (b) the mercy of God can touch us and u(c) empower us to be merciful to others

 - b. All suffering will lead to two possible results:
 - i. Compassion
 - ii. Bitterness

4. Saint Gregory the Great, *Reflections on Job, 3:39-40*: "It is characteristic of holy men that their own painful trials do not make them lose their concern for the well-being of others. They are grieved by the adversity they must endure, yet they look out for others and teach them needed lessons; they are like gifted physicians who are themselves stricken and lie ill. They suffer wounds but bring others the medicine that restores health."

5. Saint Augustine: (*Sermon 19: 2-3*): "You now have the offering you are to make. No need to examine the herd, no need to outfit ships and travel to the most remote provinces in search of incense. Search within your heart for what is pleasing to God. Your heart must be crushed. Are you afraid that it might perish so? You have the reply: Create a clean heart in me, O God. For a clean heart to be created, the unclean one must be crushed."

- iii. Compassion = Pope Francis says it best
 1. "(1) to suffer with, (2) to suffer together, (3) to not remain indifferent to the pain and suffering of others."

- b. Second Quality: Mercy is the entry that allows compassion to effective
 - i. Two ways to live "mercy"
 1. "From above"

2. "From Below"
 - a. "Smelling like the sheep" demands mercy "from below"
- c. Third Quality: Mercy requires accompaniment that leads to affirming the dignity of the person (more discussion in our final talk)
 - i. Danger: We reduce those in need to a commodity
 1. Point: Not enough to meet the immediate physical needs of a person and then send them on their way
 - a. True Healing: Walk with them and acknowledge their dignity as a person:
 - i. Story: "Senora" for Pope Francis
 - ii. Family as a hospital:
 1. Place where we are cared: experience the love of God
 2. Place where we can be encouraged: to do to others what we have received

III. "Spiritual Compassion": What is it?

- a. Reconciliation is at the heart of all spiritual compassion
 - i. No greater chains in life than the ones of our sins
 1. Jesus: Physical healing through the forgiveness of sins
 - ii. We have already spoken about sacramental reconciliation
 1. There is much more to do:
- b. Three Elements of Spiritual Compassion that involves all God's people
 - i. First Element: "Apostolate of the Ear"
 1. Fine art of "Listening": Three elements
 - a. Active listening:
 - i. Suspend your conceptions to allow the person to be who he/she is and not want you want
 - ii. Suspend your immediate desire to "Solve the problem"
 - b. Patient listening
 - i. Hard to be patient....brings great healing.
 1. Why?

- a. Many times people are not looking for an answer...they want to know that they are not alone
 - b. Presence brings healing
 - c. "Speak to what is heard"
 - i. Passivity before grace and its power
 - 1. "Spiritual intuition"
- ii. Second Element: "Building Bridges"
 - 1. Image when I arrived in Bridgeport
 - a. Heart of our Faith:
 - i. Bridge built between God and humanity in Jesus Christ
 - b. Challenge: Building Bridges in not easy
 - i. In our own families
 - ii. Among friends who have betrayed us
 - iii. Sinner vs. the Sin
 - 1. "Phenomenon of the Scholars"
 - a. Luke 17: 11-19: Story of the Lepers in the Gospel
 - i. Context: The law was designed to protect the people and not the good of the leper
 - 1. They were banished precisely to protect everyone else
 - ii. Jesus: Different Kind of Logic
 - 1. He reverses the premise of the Law and goes to the Leper
 - a. Break through the isolation, guilt and fear that the law created
 - 2. Goal: Reaffirm the Dignity of the sinner despite his/her sins
 - a. This is harder than it sounds when the effects of the sin are severe!
- c. Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy:
 - i. Advise those in doubt
 - ii. Teach the ignorant
 - iii. Admonish sinners
 - iv. Console the afflicted

- v. Forgive offenses
- vi. Be patient with the annoying
- vii. Pray to God for the living and the dead

IV. “Corporal Compassion”

a. Three Principles about Corporal Compassion

i. First: Some are called to give more than others

1. Saint Leo the Great, *Sermo 6 de Quadragesima, 1-2*:

- a. “The works of mercy are innumerable. Their very variety brings advantage to those who are true Christians, that in the matter of almsgiving not only the rich and affluent but also those of average means and the poor are able to play their part. Those who are unequal in their capacity to give can be equal in the love within their hearts.”

2. Saint John of the Cross:

- a. “In the evening of our life, we will be judged on love alone”

ii. Second: We will eradicate corporeal suffering

1. Jesus Himself taught us this

a. Why will it never be fully eradicated?

- i. Sin
- ii. It is a means of grace: “Corrupted”

iii. Third: The great obstacle to corporal work of mercy is Indifference

b. Seven Corporal Works of Mercy:

- i. Feed the hungry
- ii. Give drink to the thirsty
- iii. Dress the naked
- iv. House the pilgrim
- v. Visit the sick
- vi. Visit the imprisoned
- vii. Bury the dead

V. Conclusion:

a. Misericordia: “Mercy put into action”

- i. Story: Maximilian Kolbe’s sacrifice of his life

1. Kolbe: Polish Franciscan Conventual Friar
 - a. Died in Auschwitz Concentration Camp
 - i. August 14, 1941
 - ii. “Apostle of Consecration to Mary”
2. Compassion he felt for this nameless man is a living testimony to what mercy in action really means.
 - a. How far in his footsteps are we willing to walk?