



Homily for
THE OCTAVE DAY OF CHRISTMAS -
SOLEMNITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY,
THE MOTHER OF GOD
1 January, 2016

Fr. Dwayne's homily follows....

I. I would like to share with you a joke that made the rounds several years ago. I haven't heard it for quite some time, so maybe it will bring a chuckle out of you, as well.

One day Jesus was taking a walk through heaven and spotted several people who were not supposed to be there – they were supposed to be at the “other” place. So he went to the front gates to talk to Peter about that. When he asked Peter how this could be, Peter said that whenever some of these unsavory types show up at the gates, he tells them to go to hell. But then they sneak around the back door, knock softly, and your mother lets them in! Jesus apologized to Peter and continued his walk around heaven.

Perhaps that's not how it happens in heaven, but it clearly communicates the message of mercy – a message which we would easily associate with both Jesus and Mary. “Mercy” is a noble concept to have in mind as we conclude the octave of Christmas and look down the long path of the new year which lies in front of

us. In fact, it is the refrain for the responsorial psalm today: “May God bless us in his mercy.”

II. As you know, Pope Francis inaugurated the Year of Mercy on December 8th. It will conclude on Nov. 20. So we are just getting a good start and we will have nearly this entire calendar year to enter into this concept of “mercy.” Pope Francis has invited us to both a) reflect upon how God’s mercy is evident in our lives: how do we experience God’s mercy? and b) how can we show God’s mercy to others?

In order to do that we can take a cue from Mary who certainly knew both God’s mercy and had the compassionate heart of a merciful person.

III. St. Luke tells us Mary pondered the wondrous events which were filling her life: “And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.” We can easily envision Mary doing this.

We see Mary’s appreciation of God’s mercy in the beautiful Magnificat where Mary proclaims the many ways in which God had shown mercy – both in her own life and in the life of her people, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord...for he has looked with favor on his servant. ...the Almighty has done great things for me...he has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. ...He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his

children forever.”

Throughout the Magnificat Mary shows her recognition of God’s mercy.

After the visitation when Mary proclaimed this Magnificat, she has plenty more things to think about: the birth of John the Baptist, the trip to Bethlehem, giving birth to Jesus in a stable, the shepherds visiting and so on... As Luke tells us, Mary kept these things in her heart.

IV. But this was more than just treasuring memories in her heart, more than a trip down memory lane, more than reminiscing. This was a *spiritual* activity – this was prayer. Mary’s reflection upon these things led her to continue to recognize God’s mercy evident in her life.

That can be our starting point for this new year as well. Where – in what ways – have we seen, have you seen God’s mercy in your life?

- when and how have you experienced God’s forgiveness?
- how has forgiveness been extended to you by others?
- where have there been signs of God’s action, God’s loving action in your life or the life of your family?
- where have you seen signs of God’s mercy in the history of the world? In events of world affairs?

Hopefully, by beginning the year in contemplation, by pondering the blessings of God in our hearts we will easily recognize God’s mercy in the year ahead.

V. And how does our contemplation inspire us to do things differently?

St. Paul tells us that because of the Incarnation, because of the birth of Christ,

we are no longer slaves, but heirs to God's kingdom. Not only do we have a share in the kingdom, but we are also to live as children of God. As mercy has been shown to us, so we, in turn, reflect that same mercy to others.

Pope Francis has suggested the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy as practical, tangible ways in which we can demonstrate mercy to others. These are very "hands on" ways to lead us into works of mercy. Giving drink to the thirsty, food to the hungry, sheltering the homeless, admonishing sinners, counseling the doubtful, comforting the sorrowing and so on are all things each of us can do in some way.

Throughout this Year of Mercy, we can make a huge difference in the world and help to make God's kingdom more evident among us.

VI. Mary was the first to make the real presence of Christ available to us. Her model of reflection upon God's marvelous workings in her life can inspire us to continue to make Christ's body and blood available to all we meet.

Fr. Kyle's homily follows....

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God. One of the most impressive things about Mary is her ability to know and follow the will of God. This is what makes her such a great saint. This is what made it possible for her to be the Mother of God.

But often times in our lives I think it is hard to figure out what God's will is for us. What does God want us to do in this situation or that? How did Mary know God's will for her so clearly?

The Gospel today gives us a hint. It says that “Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart”. In short, she prayed and this helped to reveal what God’s will was in her life.

I would like to propose that prayer is not only a good thing for us to do, but is essential if we are going to know and follow the will of God. It is essential if we are going to be the saints that God is calling us to be. Here are a couple things we can do.

1. At the beginning of the day, spend 5 or 10 minutes in the morning thinking about what we have to do that day. In doing this, we can offer all of our works, efforts, and even frustrations and sufferings to God. Also, if we know we are going to be in a particularly tempting situation or around someone that annoys us or we do not like, we can mentally and spiritually prepare ourselves to avoid that temptation or to treat that person with love even though they may irritate us. This short time of prayer in the morning can help us see how we might be able to do God’s will in the day ahead of us.

2. At the end of the day, spend 10 or 15 minutes thinking about our day. What did we do well? In what ways did we mess up? What are the blessings in our life that we should be grateful for? This can help us to see possible pitfalls and weaknesses in our life so we can avoid them in the future. It also gives us a heart of gratitude which ultimately brings about more happiness. We often toil over and get anxious about the bad things going on in our life. What would happen if we only focused on these and never took the time to be grateful for the blessings in our life?

Prayer is not just important, it is the daily bread that feeds us. Just as we need food to sustain our physical body, so we need the fruit of prayer to sustain or spiritual life so we do not become weak. Prayer is not just an important thing for us to do. It is necessary if we are to know the will of God. It is necessary is we are going to be the saints that God is calling us to be.