

Trinity 4

I take as my text today from St. Luke's Gospel:

Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.

If I throw out the term hypocrisy, what comes to mind? For many, in this modern era, a first thought is politicians. As we have seen in recent years, politics and hypocrisy form a pretty close bond.

What about faultfinding? Where does it fit in today? How about mercy?

In the Gospel passage we read today from St. Luke, we find these three seemingly independent thoughts at odds yet, indeed, they are mutually dependent: the concepts of mercy, faultfinding, and hypocrisy.

Of all our human traits, being merciful is the most positive, while being judgmental and hypocritical are the most negative and, without a doubt, the most destructive.

Indeed, faultfinding, or being judgmental, is one of the most powerful of our human traits and, perhaps, one of the most negative, destructive forces in our human relationships.

More than ever, in today's world, especially our world — our nation — this destructive nature, especially of hypocrisy, has led us, as a nation, to what many now see as an attack on all the greatness that has been achieved as expressed in the Declaration of Independence.

There are those of various organizations and movements who have been more than judgmental in denigrating our founding fathers, and those who followed in their footsteps, who propelled this nation forward to be a shining example for the world.

What we are witnessing among the leadership of our own nation is reminiscent of a time just two millennia ago, witnessed by St. Luke.

Being judgmental was such a common characteristic of the Pharisees and Jewish leadership of our Lord's time that He addressed it again and again. They seemed addicted to censure, being apt to blame or condemn others, and were severe in making remarks about others.

Jesus referred to those who were so judgmental as hypocrites, saying they were worse than the people they criticized.

Many of us, to some extent, and from time-to-time, have given in to the temptation of harsh judgments and petty faultfinding. We can quite easily see the trail of ill consequences that these two human traits — faultfinding and hypocrisy — have left throughout history.

This form of hypocrisy is universal and at the very heart of it is a lack of mercy and a lack of love, that is, love defined as the highest Christian virtue, called *Charity* by St. Paul.

Being judgmental has a parallel, the Sixth Commandment, *Thou shalt do no murder*, for attacking and destroying the self-worth of an individual is no less than extinguishing a part of his life.

*Judge not, and ye shall not be judged;
condemn not, and ye shall not be
condemned.*

Yet, we may ask the question, does this mean that we should never be critical? Not at all. In this regard, what Jesus was, in essence, saying was don't involve yourself in unkind and frivolous criticism. Needless-to-say, there will always be times when, as Christians, it will be our *Christian Duty* to judge and severely condemn things with which the world is unconcerned from the spiritual perspective and obsessed with from a material perspective. In so doing, we are pursuing our Christian duty to press the truth.

The difference is between the rooting out of evil and the lack of charity. The emphasis is on how we exercise our Christian duty.

It is so easy to see the faults of others and especially easy to overlook our own shortcomings. Jesus points that out to us in the parable about the mote in one's eye when He said:

*...why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye,
but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?
Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me
pull out the mote that is in thine own eye, when thou
thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye?
Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own
eye, and then thou shalt see clearly to pull out the mote
that is in thy brother's eye.*

In our Lord's parable, the meaning of *mote* and *beam* become of great significance to us as Christians, the mote being a small twig or stalk that stands for a relatively small fault; while the beam, the great roof-beam of a house and thousands times larger than an eye, standing for the *want of love*, a monstrous vice under Christ's law.

If, however, we are to keep the message of our Lord's parable in proper context, we must reflect on the concept of mercy, remembering that the passage for today began with instruction to be merciful, even as God is merciful.

Each day of our lives, each hour, indeed, each moment, we are beneficiaries of God's mercy undeservedly. The multitudinous blessings we enjoy are proofs of His mercy.

It follows, then, that if we show mercy to our fellow human beings, especially to those of poor estate or are in particular need of our mercy, we are being like our heavenly Father in whose image we are created. If our benevolence is selfless, it should follow that the Spirit of God is within us and we are securing our own reward both temporal and eternal.

But when we take it upon ourselves to judge others, to cast disparaging remarks, to lay blame, and so forth, we are failing to live up to God's expectations and fall short of obeying His Commandments, in particular the Sixth Command — we are assassinating the individual; we are, in essence, committing murder.

Our human nature is so transparent; we can be so quick to point the finger; so quick to avoid accepting responsibility for our actions; and even quicker to lay the blame on someone else.

At the same time, we can be so slow to show mercy; slow if not intransigent in unlocking our hearts and embracing the Christian concept of charity that is central to our relationships with each other, and within society, as well as our relationship to God.

This strikes to the heart of what Jesus was trying to get across. Not just that we refrain from doing something bad to another but that we go beyond that and strive to do good things.

If we are to be merciful, our efforts must be directed toward imitating Christ; it is He with whom we are to compare our conduct as Christians.

Yes, in comparing ourselves with others when it comes to our Christian Conduct, we may fair very well; but, truly, it is with God that we are to be compared; and in that comparison we are in default.

It is amazing, when we think of it, that God loves us all, saint or sinner, and wants only the best for each of us. It is His very Nature.

Though we are created in God's image, we find it is easier to love those who love us than to love those with whom we have little or nothing in common; to embrace those who bring joy into our lives rather than the downtrodden; to return favor with favor.

The love we have toward those who are dear to us is something we can't help, it's part of our nature. But the idea of loving our enemies is a different story: it goes to the heart and to the will. It is something we can, through God's Grace, *will* ourselves to do.

We should not forget that the summary of the Law is Love: to love God and to love our neighbor.

The essence of this love toward our neighbor is mercy; it is forgiveness; it is giving.

....give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

In ancient times, people throughout the world wore long, wide, and loose garments; when they needed to carry any thing that their hands could not hold, they used a fold of their robe in nearly the same way as women in more recent times have used their aprons. Jesus makes note of this with the phrase ***shall men give into your bosom*** in reference to this practice, that as we abound in our acts of beneficence, so an overflowing plenty of good things should be returned to us, more than we can carry in the fold of our robe or apron.

This brings us back to the beginning: the concepts of mercy, faultfinding, and hypocrisy.

Faultfinding and hypocrisy are counter-productive and destructive. They are human failings that disrupt and destroy relationships: the relationships we have with each other, within society, within our nation, and with our relationship with God.

Mercy, on the other hand, brings us closer to being like God. It is positive. We often call it the *Golden Rule*: do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

All too often, this *Golden Rule* is expressed in the negative. But the very basis of the Christian ethic is not just in refraining from doing bad things, rather, it is doing good things. More than that, it is in doing the extra things: going beyond what the ordinary person would do.

God sends His rain on the just and the unjust alike; He embraces the sinner as well as the saint.

It is God's love for all of his creation that binds us to Him, that flows in and through us, and is the binding force of our relationships with each other.

Our goal as Christians is not to compare ourselves to others as to how we fare in being good, or merciful; rather our goal is to compare ourselves with God Incarnate, Jesus Christ. It is He alone that matters; it is He alone that we are to emulate.