

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.

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

Now, when we hear the term hypocrisy, what comes to mind? For most of us in today's society, a first thought might well be politicians. As we have seen over the year and, especially in recent years, politics and hypocrisy form a pretty close bond.

But what about faultfinding? and how about mercy?

Of all our human traits, and there are many, 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 in 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 we, as a nation, have achieved; all that has been accomplished in fulfilling the ideals of the Declaration of Independence.

Think of the various organizations and movements that have been more than guilty of denigrating our founding fathers, denigrating those who followed in their footsteps to propel 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. The leadership of that day 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. And we can certainly see the trail of ill consequences that these two human traits — faultfinding and hypocrisy — have left throughout our own 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? In the proper context, not at all, for what Jesus was, in essence, saying was don't involve yourself in unkind and frivolous criticism.

Of course, 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, moral 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 being on how we exercise our Christian duty.

We, as Christians, always have moral obligations, while, at the same time, we also must keep things in proper context, the context of Christian Love, remembering that 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.

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 who 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.

Because our human nature is subject to frailty, we can be 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 fare 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.

Shall men give into your bosom, 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 ever carry in our arms, more than we can ever imagine.

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, remember to *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.*

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. It is this Love that God wants us to emulate, and it is to his Son Jesus Christ that we must compare ourselves as we strive to attain our goal as Christians.