**Homily 02/10/2021**

**15th Sunday After Pentecost**

# 2 Corinthians 4: 6-15 - Luke 6: 31-36 18

# There was once a king, who had a very large orchard. In this orchard was planted a variety of fruit trees. To ensure that the trees were always at their best, and that the fruits they produced were always 1st class, the king employed a skilled gardener.Each day, the gardener would pick the ripest and juiciest fruits from the trees and gather them in a basket. Every morning, when the royal court was in session, the gardener would present the fruits he had picked to the king.One day, having harvested cherries, the gardener placed them in his basket and presented them to the king. On this particular day the king was in a bad mood. He scanned the basket of cherries and selected one to taste. It was sour, and the King was livid! Venting his anger on the gardener the king threw a cherry at the gardener. The cherry hit the gardener right between the eyes. “God is merciful!", the gardener responded. Somewhat bemused the king enquired, "You must be hurt and angry, but you say God is merciful, why?""Your Majesty, replied the gardener, I thought today I might bring pineapples; But changed my mind. If you had thrown a pineapple at me, I would have been very badly hurt. And so, God was merciful for having changed my mind."

# The last time I stood here and offered you a homily I spoke about how inattentive we can be and how little thought we sometimes give to the words we use. I think ‘mercy’ may be such a word. Do you realise that this word ‘Mercy’ will be said nearly 40 times during this liturgy? When you hear or say the word mercy, what does it mean to you? What thoughts go through your mind? Do you tune out? or do you think - mercy, of course?

# We use this word so many times in our Orthodox worship, in our Private prayers, And, of course, in the Jesus Prayer; ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner’. But what does this sacred word mean to you?

In Today’s gospel reading we are given very clear instructions by our Lord; v31 – “Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise”. We are instructed to ‘Love your enemies’, to ‘Do good’, to ‘Lend, hoping for nothing in return, and finally, to ‘Be merciful, just as your father is merciful’

If we are going to ask for mercy; and, if we are to follow our Lord’s instructions and be merciful, it makes sense that we should have a clear understanding of what mercy is! In the Bible ‘mercy’ often relates to ‘forgiveness’ or to ‘withholding punishment’. But the Bible also defines mercy beyond just this forgiveness and withholding punishment. God shows his mercy for those who are suffering through healing, comfort, the alleviation of suffering and by caring about those in distress. In other words by, what I believe is the forgotten virtue **‘Compassion”**

It only takes a quick glance at the news or social media to see that there is much going on in the world that can be divisive, misleading, or confusing. Not least of which can be conflicting information and opinions regarding the Coronavirus.

All around us voices shout out to be heard! All this confusion and negativity can affect our friends, our families, even ourselves. It can be tempting for us to join in; To voice our opinions, to shout to be heard, to become a keypad warrior and jump in and join the social media battles. But we must try to remember, first and foremost, that we are **Christians!** We are not called to reflect the ways of the world but the ways of Christ! We are not called to get involved with negative banter or contentious debates. We are instead called to be instruments of peace, reconciliation and mercy.

To be compassionate! To be Christ-like. To do this we must be willing to LISTEN. To listen, not just enough as to find something to attack or criticize, or to win or to be right. One must listen in a way that shows our respect for the person before us. Knowing that ...

**“Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object**

**presented to your senses.” (C S Lewis)**

To reflect Christ in the world we must first learn to truly listen. This takes patience and hard work, especially when it comes to divisive or contentious issues. But it is necessary.

One thing that I have learned as an Orthodox Christian, and especially in my University Chaplaincy work is the value of giving questions instead of answers! I have often found that behind many opinions are a host of assumptions – often incorrect assumptions. Again, I think this is very evident on social media platforms. It is only by asking questions that we can get a clearer picture of what is forming an opinion, or what is causing a concern or fear; Why ‘the other’ feels so angry, or passionate about an issue

During His earthly ministry Jesus was a master of questions. He asked questions to make others think about important issues or to help them understand who he was, and what he had come to do. Jesus always began his relationships by focusing on the other person's agenda. To do that, He asked questions.

There is much division in the world and, sadly, within the Church. We would do well to remember that it is the devil who divides and the Lord, the Holy Spirit, is the One who unites. It is the Lord, the Holy Spirit who can strengthen us and inspire us to seek union over division, to bring peace into this world, and into our relationships. We are called to be peacemakers, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God”

if we are to be followers of Jesus, we need to be people who help bring people together who help divided ‘sides’ to unite who are, as we read in Ephesians 4 :32, ***“Kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another,*** as ***God forgave you’***”. A people who are compassionate and **“…merciful, just as your Father also is merciful”**



Fr Julian