

## Commentary on the Readings for September 17, 2023

### The 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The theme of today's Mass is 'Mercy' and, more specifically, God's mercy toward sinners. However, when we think of 'mercy' we usually think of it as an antidote for some harm done to us or to others. It can be physical, mental, verbal, etc. but we most often think about it in terms of combating or balancing violence and we want to settle the score. Now stop and look at the above sentences. The word 'think' is there three times. We don't give much thought to our giving mercy and yet, we are always asking God for His mercy and are impatient when it is not forthcoming as quickly as we want. Let us see what the following scripture have to say about this.

The **First Reading** is from the *Book of Sirach (27:30-28:7 [130A])*. In this passage, from the great sage of wisdom whom we call Sirach, we have a few examples of evil and a whole list of antidotes or words of wisdom to rectify those evils and avoid others. Together these are valuable instructions that embody both examples of evil and of mercy and he asks us to see where we fit into this picture and then sums it up with a version of the second most important commandment: "Love thy neighbor as thyself."

The **Responsorial Psalm is (103:1-4, 9-12)**. This psalm is a prayer that anyone who has experienced mercy might offer after a serious problem. For example: Anyone who has made a sincere confession after a long time away from the Sacrament will feel many of the blessings mentioned herein and a great weight will be lifted from his heart because God looks at the heart of a person more than his actions.

The **Second Reading** is from *St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (14:7-9)*. In this short but powerful passage, Paul lays it out clearly that we are not here on this earth all by our self. Rather, we are here to fulfill our part in God's great Plan of Salvation and we must do it in conjunction with others. Therefore, we must learn to help each other in fulfilling all the parts. As Paul says in another part of Romans, we are all part of the Body of Christ and if one member of the Body refuses to fulfill his part of the job, it affects the entire Body. Mercy plays a great part in all of our actions.

The **Gospel Reading** is from the *Gospel of Matthew (18:21-35)*. This teaching, directly from Jesus, is a great example of mercy in action and in refusing to be merciful. It is a sad account of a person pleading mercy for himself and yet refusing to give it to someone else. As I mentioned above, we are all here to help each other and our final reward will be measured by how well we helped others. I have experienced people who have shut their door to others but say copious prayers for mercy and other blessings for themselves. This is another example of the same situation being presented by Jesus in this Gospel passage, and so we must learn to: "Do unto others as you would want them to do to you." This is what mercy is all about. Something to think about during your prayer time this week!

**MFB**