

A Word From Fr. Tom Niehaus

September 15, 2019



Our Merciful Father

When reading the parable of the Merciful Father, two lines of scripture stand out. First, the wayward son in the depth of his separation from the father comes to his senses and returns home where he is embraced by the father causing him to say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son (Luke 15:21)." The father sees beyond the son's selfishness, listens to the sincere cry of repentance and showers upon him gifts of mercy, love and joy. Second, the faithful son in the depth of working hard to please the father and positioning himself in doing and saying the right things, becomes crestfallen at the generous outpouring of love for the son who squandered everything. It is to the older son that the father says, "My son, you are here with me always; everything that I have is yours (Luke 15:31)." The freely offered love and mercy of the father in this parable challenges our notion of exactly how just is the love that God our Heavenly Father showers down upon His people. As St. John Paul II wrote, "The father of the prodigal son is faithful to his fatherhood, faithful to the love that he had always lavished on his son. This fidelity is expressed in the parable not only by his immediate readiness to welcome him home when he returns after having squandered his inheritance; it is expressed even more fully by that joy, that merrymaking for the squanderer after his return, merrymaking which is so generous that it provokes the opposition and hatred of the elder brother, who had never gone far away from his father and had never abandoned the home (Dives Misericordia 6)." It is the mind-boggling love of God the Father that is freely given to all of us who humble ourselves and ask for it. There can be deep sorrow for past sins in our life as we find ourselves discovering the richness of the Father's love for us. In the midst of this sorrow, we have an opportunity to repent, turn away from our sins and make reparation for the wrongs we have inflicted upon God and our neighbor. Turning to Mary, we can find ourselves softening in our hardness of heart and lowering our pride, so as to approach the Father humbly and with a contrite heart. Mary, Our Mother of Mercy, is the one who has the deepest knowledge of the mystery of God's mercy. "No one has experienced, to the same degree as the Mother of the crucified One, the mystery of the cross, the overwhelming encounter of divine transcendent justice with love: that 'kiss' given by mercy to justice" (Dives in Misericordia, 97). Mary, through her participation in the Passion of her son Jesus, offers us a genuine example of fidelity, humility and unwavering love. She never lashes out at God, but rather continues to proclaim His praise in the midst of deep injustice that was inflicted upon Jesus. Let us take the opportunity this weekend to weep with sorrow for the wrongs we have done and sing for joy a new song of praise to the Father for truly, "His mercy endures forever!"

Reception of Holy Communion

"Truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you (John 6:53)." The Holy Eucharist is a great gift offered to us by Jesus Christ. Every person who approaches the altar to receive Holy Communion should be as prepared as they can to receive their Lord and Savior. As I reflect upon my first two and half months in the parish, I have observed some behaviors that sadden and disappoint me when it comes to the reception of Holy Communion. Some people chew gum during Mass and expect to receive the Eucharist, some with writing on their hands expect the host to be placed on that part of the hand for Holy Communion, others grab at the Sacred Host rather than receiving the host on the hand and still some who have been seen talking and shaking hands as they come up the line for receiving Holy Communion. As St. Paul states, "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself (1 Corinthians 11:27-29)." The same teachings of the Catholic Church still apply when it comes to the reception of Holy Communion: "Anyone who is conscious of grave sin must receive the Sacrament of Confession before coming to communion (CCC 1385)," as well as "...the faithful should observe the fast required in their Church (CCC 1387)," and "Bodily demeanor [gestures, clothing] ought to convey the respect, solemnity and joy of this moment (CCC 1387)." The law the governs the Church states, "A person who is to receive the Most Holy Eucharist is to abstain for at least one hour before holy communion from any food and drink, except for only water and medicine, a priest who celebrates the Most Holy Eucharist two or three times on the same day can take something before the second or third Mass even if there is less than one hour between them, and the elderly, the infirm and those who care for them can receive the Most Holy Eucharist even if they have eaten something within the preceding hour (Code of Canon Law 919)." Rather than being legalistic, we should desire to be as prepared as we can to receive the Lord Jesus Christ in Holy Communion and do all that we can to be ready for this special moment in mind, body and soul.

Thank You

Many accolades and thanks go out to the leadership and volunteers who helped with the St. Canice Fall Festival in Kilkenny on September 8, 2019. Though it was rainy and cool there was a great turn-out and it seemed to me to be a positive atmosphere with lots of joy all around. I was impressed by the number of people that came out from the entire region especially those families from Most Holy Redeemer and St. Patrick who were present to support the cause of their neighbors at St. Canice. It is a great blessing to serve in parishes where people come together and do great things for Jesus Christ!

With prayers and love,

Fr. Tom Niehaus