

One of the most beautiful attributes of the God we serve is the mercy we are offered through our faith in Jesus Christ. Christ’s mercy is shocking, it is unexpected, and yet in the gospel we see Christ bestowing mercy time and time and time again.

A couple of years ago I sat in the line at Starbucks. I admit I was running late to work after dropping my son off and I was in a hurry. The car in front of me got under my skin. They took forever to order. They would not move up when the other cars moved up and when it came time to pay, they bent over into the passenger seat for what seemed like 10 minutes searching for coins to pay.

I was not pleased...but I tried to wait patiently. Flustered as I rolls up to the drive thru window finally receiving the coffee, I ordered from what seemed like 20 minutes before the staff member told me your coffee has been paid for by the person who just left.

I looked at them with my mouth open wide in shock. Surely the driver had seen the annoyance on my face and taken pity on me.

The reason her transaction had taken so long is that she paid for her breakfast, and had leaned over the passenger seat to find two dollars worth of change to pay for my coffee.

I was in shock, surely I did not deserve this act of mercy and grace. Especially because of how I had been acting. And yet this is the same grace that we see Christ offer to countless people in the Bible.

In our lectionary scripture for today we see Christ bestow mercy upon 10 people who had leprosy. At that time anyone with leprosy was exiled outside of the community because others were afraid of getting the horrible disease. This means that anyone who got leprosy had to leave everything they ever knew. They had to leave their job, their family, their friends, and their relationships. They were not allowed to set foot back into the city until they had been deemed clean by a priest and performed a cleansing ritual.

So, we see these ten men cry out to Jesus to have mercy upon them. Immediately Christ responds by healing them and instructs them to go to the priest so they could continue their way back into their communities.

Only one out of the ten comes back to thank Jesus for being healed. Sure, they other men may have been distracted. They got a new lease on life and probably wanted to get back to their families.

So often it is easy for us also to move forward in our faith without thanking Christ. But Christ is also offering us mercy and healing every day.

So, every day we should be starting our prayers with “Thank you God for _____” because every day God is moving in ways in which we should be thankful for.

And yet we find that it is easier to complain about the things not going right than to give thanks to God for the things that are going right.

In his book, *A Complaint Free World*, Will Bowen explains the top five reasons we complain through the fitting acronym of G.R.I.P.E.

- 1) **G**et Attention
- 2) **R**emove Responsibility
- 3) **I**nspire Envy
- 4) **P**ower
- 5) **E**xcuse Poor Performance

We are all guilty of complaining to our family and friends when things don't go our way. It is easy to get stuck in the Eeyore mindset where we may feel that everything bad that could ever happen is happening to us.

I think that the lepers in our scripture for today could relate to this feeling. They probably asked God: “Why did this have to happen to me?” I think we all ask God that question at some point in our lives when we don't understand why we are in the situation we are in.

I think that the exiles that Jeremiah was addressing in our Old Testament scripture could also relate to the desire to complain. Here they had left everything because God called them to go.

They were going into the unknown and leaving everything familiar. Like all of us at some point they were hoping to return home, but God had other plans in mind for God's people.

God in God’s mercy showed them that a new home would be made for them. The prophet Jeremiah delivered these words of hope they were waiting to hear. God told them it was time to settle in this new place and their new home. There they were to build houses and start families.

Although I am sure this is not what the people of God expected, since they wanted to return home, God in God’s mercy made for them a new home and a new life.

So often we think that God’s act of mercy upon our lives will help us get back to life as we know it, but time and time again in Scripture we see God’s mercy calls us to a new life.

In our humanity we try to put God’s mercy in a box. We think we should receive it when we ask for it and we think God should give it to the people we think deserve it and yet time and time again we see that God’s mercy is deep and wide. God’s mercy breaks through walls of division among us. It does not discriminate, and it is available to all people.

Pope Francis often tells a story in his sermons about his own life and his profound encounter of God’s mercy:

Pope Francis repeatedly tells a story which he says was the source of his vocation and spirituality. When he was a young man of 17, he was heading to the train in Buenos Aires one day for his school’s annual picnic and thinking of proposing to a girlfriend at the picnic. As he passed by the local church, he decided to pop in to say a prayer. There he met a young, friendly priest and decided to go to confession. Something happened in that confession which Pope Francis describes as an encounter with God who had been waiting for him. In the encounter he experienced unmistakably and powerfully the mercy of God for him and for all people. He knew from that experience that the only meaning his life could have would be to show everyone the mercy of God. In that moment, He felt called and he discovered a special vocation of mercy. He did not go to the train or the picnic that day. He did not propose to his girlfriend. His life and its course was completely changed in that moment. And, he tells us that because of that experience more than 60 years ago he adopted the motto as archbishop,

cardinal, and pope “*miserando atque eligendo*” which he translates “having been shown mercy and chosen to show mercy.”¹

In 2016 Pope Francis released his first book while serving as Pope and entitled it: “The Name of God is Mercy.” In this book, Pope Francis says, “God “does not want anyone to be lost. His mercy is infinitely greater than our sins.”²

I am so thankful for Pope Francis’ call to mercy.

So often our first inclination is to respond in judgement instead of mercy. We see this was true in Jesus’ time as well. In John 8 we hear the story of the woman caught in adultery. When Jesus showed up her community was about to stone her as they were following the laws of Moses.

When they asked Jesus what they should do he said: “...let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!” (John 8:7). That day Jesus saved this woman’s life and called her to a new one...he offered her mercy, but it did not come without some instruction. As Jesus sent her on her way he told her to: “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11).

As we embody the outward life of mercy to which Jesus Christ is calling us we are also called to work inward spiritual life with God. We are called to practice the spiritual disciplines of prayer and reading the Bible, so that when we are faced with an opportunity to respond in mercy, we will not miss it.

We are an extension of the mercy of Christ and we are called to offer mercy to each person we encounter.

The good news for our lives today is that Christ’s mercy is available to us each and every day.

We are called to respond to this extravagant act of God with thanksgiving and then we are called to bestow this mercy upon others.

We are thankful to God when we take time each day to list what God has done for us. We are thankful to God when we seek out to be part of offering God’s mercy in our communities.

¹ “God is Waiting for You” by Friar Tom Washburn. <http://afriarslife.blogspot.com/2016/02/>

² Pope Francis. “The Name of God is Mercy.” Random House. New York, New York. 2016.

We are thankful to God when we receive the mercy that has been offered to us and don't beat ourselves up. We are thankful to God, when we take time out the busyness of our lives to serve those in need of mercy.

I know that day in the drive thru I was convicted that I was not treating the person in front of me as my sister in Christ. I think about that moment of mercy now each time I am in a drive thru line.

Each day God gives us at least five opportunities to share the mercy of Christ. Whether we bestow it upon our family, friends, or strangers, this kind of mercy is the kind of thing that changes peoples' lives.

How will you receive Christ's mercy today? Will you let go of the things that have been holding you back to serve God?

How will you bestow God's mercy to someone today? Will you call a loved one or send a card? Will you smile at a stranger?

Each day we have a decision to make to follow the will of God or to follow our own will. May we like the leper who came back to thank Christ, and always be on the lookout for the ways in which we are invited to be part of God's mercy in the world. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.