

Feb. 20-21, 2016

Thoughts from the pastor,

Last week I wrote about how Pope Francis is encouraging us to take advantage of the Year of Mercy by participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This week I would like to go back to a theme that I worked on a couple years ago, how God wants us to be a part of His royal family.

If we are being called by God to be his family, brothers and sisters of His Son Jesus, and His children in the Kingdom of Heaven then we are going to be a part of the royal family. In God's eyes Mary was certainly seen as the greatest of His daughters so she was chosen to be the mother of His Son, Jesus. Because she did that so well she was given the title of Queen of Heaven. On our part we are in training to be a prince or a princess in the kingdom. This image helps me so much as I am hearing confessions.

Many people have a hard time figuring out how God can be so forgiving. Pope Francis speaks of that willingness to forgive as God's mercy. It has been hard for me and, I have found out, many others to imagine that mercy. We look at our own weaknesses and those of others and the kind of forgiveness that the Church teaches doesn't seem very realistic. But it is my contention that we do see it. We just don't make the connection. This is partly because it is not common between adults. We have a hard time forgiving each other. We believe that other adults have the same knowledge that we have and therefore don't do hurtful things. This is strange because we see ourselves with all this knowledge of right and wrong but we each still do hurtful things. But that is just the way we are.

With parent and child it is a different thing. One of our children can do hurtful things over and over again and we will still never tire of hoping that this same child will someday come and apologize, ask to be reinstated in the family activities. And as a parent we will help them get cleaned up and proudly bring them forward as our son or daughter. We are willing to do this over and over as the child makes mistakes. This is why the concept of mercy in scripture is portrayed as coming from the Father.

The Prodigal Son story is primary in Jesus' teaching of this loving mercy. When the son comes back to the father for forgiveness the father accepts him and puts a ring on his finger, shoes on his feet, gets him the finest robe, and has a grand party. This is not the reluctant acceptance of a messed up hired hand, or the cautious renewal of a hurtful friendship. The father is treating his son like royalty. God wants us to know that when we come back, we are coming back to the status of the royal family. It is his dream for us. God is delighted to help clean up and mend the royal gown of one of His daughters that have strayed. And the Prodigal Son story shows how he treats the son who has strayed.

Since my Confirmation I have always seen myself as a Soldier of Christ. Some like the image of the Knight in Shining armor. Either way I picture God finding such great joy in welcoming one of them back from the battlefield of life, all battered, worn down and damaged, and repairing their armor, shining it up and giving them encouragement as they head back out into the battle. I do not have any problem envisioning God's pride in seeing us, His royal sons and daughters, getting back on the right track and ready to stand with Him and fight for His Kingdom. I just hope that message can get to those who can't seem to believe that they can be forgiven by God, for He is waiting for them in our Reconciliation Rooms. He knows what we go through in carrying our crosses or in failing to do that. He understands. He just wants His royal family together.

God bless you,
Fr. Frank