

Tridentine Community News

April 19, 2009

God's Anger and God's Mercy

On this Sunday devoted to the Divine Mercy Devotion, it is appropriate for us to reflect on just why we are asking for God's mercy.

Let's face it, mankind in the current era hasn't had the greatest track record in living up to God's commandments, individually or together. God has more than enough reasons to punish us. Our Lady of Fatima made that abundantly clear. Some speculate that certain natural disasters and plagues are sent to us because of our actions. The Holy Scriptures have numerous examples of God invoking nature against man; He is certainly capable of doing so again.

Rather than argue for or against the position that God is actively punishing or threatening to punish us, we will instead argue against the counter-position: It would be foolhardy to presume that God simply ignores every transgression. The Church makes provision for Acts of Reparation against a variety of crimes, personal and public. The Sacrament of Confession was instituted by our Lord to right ourselves with Him, and to help us develop improved spiritual habits. Indulgences were established by the Church to help us make up for temporal punishment due ourselves and to the Holy Souls in Purgatory. It doesn't take much reflection to think of some of the scores of ways we ourselves, and mankind in general, have offended the Holy Trinity. Crimes of abortion and desecration of the Blessed Sacrament are but two of the most obvious examples happening widely today.

God does not change. He wasn't angry with mankind in the 1950s and more of a pal to us in the 2000s. His standards are the same from age to age. God is merciful, yes, but God's wrath is absolutely to be feared. He is not to be viewed as primarily a punisher, yet it is only logical that He may have to assume that role on occasion, in response to man's sinful behavior. And thus it is appropriate that our prayers as well as our actions beseech Him for forgiveness for the various sins of commission and omission that we individually, and mankind collectively, commit every day.

The Church Shows Us How to Respond

Holy Mother Church recognizes that we have a need to make reparation for our personal sins and those of others. Various traditional practices and prayers give us the means to do so.

Consider the Sacrament of Confession: This Sacrament would not exist at all if the Church had no concern about the lasting effects of offending our God.

Consider many of the prayers unique to the Tridentine Mass: The Prayers at the Foot of the Altar ask God to be merciful on His unworthy servant, the priest. This theme is echoed throughout the Offertory Prayers. The wording of the Extraordinary Form Mass in general recognizes our sinful tendencies, has us acknowledge our sins, and strive to perfect our souls.

Funeral Masses in the Extraordinary Form do not presume to canonize the just-deceased. Rather, they beseech God's mercy on the soul. The *Dies Irae* Sequence in particular is a sober reminder that without God's forgiveness, a soul is doomed to hell for eternity.

Consider the acts of penance that the Church has us perform in the holy season of Lent: Fasting and abstinence are enforced. The Gloria and unaccompanied organ playing are omitted in Sunday Mass. We are encouraged to perform special acts of penance and almsgiving.

Consider Litanies: They begin with *Kyrie eleison*.

Consider the Byzantine Rite liturgies: "Lord, have mercy" is sung over and over again at many points.

Consider Rogation Days, which occur on April 25 (the Feast of St. Mark the Evangelist), and the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before the Feast of the Ascension in the Traditional Calendar: They are days of prayer of appeasement of God's anger.

Our fallen nature means we will never completely overcome sin. But we can improve our spiritual condition and thereby mitigate the anger that God may have towards us individually. Diligent attention to living a life in concert with the tenets of the Catholic faith, praying the Holy Mass (particularly the wording of the Tridentine Mass), participating in the Holy Sacraments, and striving to earn Indulgences will help us in this fight. Our Lord taught that God does show mercy if we approach Him appropriately.

The Divine Mercy Devotion fits into this matrix of spiritual tools as a means to ask forgiveness for mankind in general as well as for ourselves individually. Like Eucharistic Adoration, it is a traditionally-minded practice that is growing in a non-traditional world. It introduces concepts not often heard in many parishes. By making people think about God's wrath, the reality of hell, and the need to ask His forgiveness, the Divine Mercy Devotion also has the potential to bring lukewarm and newer Catholics to a deeper, more informed living of their faith.

By the above means, the Church has given us ways to aright ourselves with God, to reform ourselves, and to pray for our brethren. Let us make use of these great gifts.

Triduum Thanks

Thanks to all who attended the Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Vigil Tridentine Liturgies. We especially appreciate your understanding of the challenges involved in this first-time undertaking of these complex ceremonies.

Because of the sizable turnout and positive feedback we have received, Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday will again be offered according to the Extraordinary Form at St. Josaphat again in 2010, as well as Good Friday at both St. Josaphat and Assumption-Windsor.