

## A MERCY PLACE

## I TIMOTHY 1:12-17

12 I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, 13 though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, 14 and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 15 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. 17 To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

In the name of Jesus:

Years after the death of President Calvin Coolidge, this story came to light. In the early days of his presidency, Coolidge awoke one morning in his hotel room to find a cat burglar going through his pockets. Coolidge spoke up, asking the burglar not to take his watch chain because it contained an engraved charm he wanted to keep. Coolidge then engaged the thief in quiet conversation and discovered he was a college student who had no money to pay his hotel bill or buy a ticket back to campus. Coolidge counted \$32 out of his wallet -- which he had also persuaded the dazed young man to give back! -- declared it to be a loan, and advised the young man to leave the way he had come so as to avoid the Secret Service! (Yes, the loan was paid back.)

How gracious of President Coolidge! Speaking for myself, if I would have been in that position, I would have looked for the nearest thing I could grab in order to beat the thief into submission, either that or I would have called our nearest law enforcement officer. But to show mercy to a criminal, especially when caught in the act, that is going above and beyond what I would want to do.

But this is what GOD HAS CALLED US TO DO. As His Church, we are called to be a mercy place, a place where we freely receive God's mercy, so that we might live and share God's mercy with all.

A case in point is evident in our text for today, and in the life of the apostle Paul. Paul is and was the preeminent example of Christianity. If there was ever a great Christian, Paul would be on the list. He wrote many of the letters of the New Testament, went on missionary journeys to spread the Gospel. Paul is a great example for any Christian and for the Church, what a great man of God! But note what Paul writes about himself: "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."

Paul was a sinner, when he wrote this he still considered himself a sinner. Even though a Christian, a saint, he was still a sinner, he would even go so far as to say that he was the chief of sinners. Why? Because in his former life, before his conversion, Paul was a blasphemer, a persecutor of the Church, and an insolent opponent of Christ. Paul blasphemed God, cursing and swearing in his language, he cursed and swore like a sailor. He issued oaths saying that he would do all he could to destroy Christ and His followers. He persecuted the followers of Christ, standing approvingly as Stephen was stoned for his faith, and even going to cities searching out Christians to kill them. A veritable witch hunt after Christians! And Paul was an insolent opponent of Christ and His Church, a sadist, if you will, delighting in the extermination of Christians and Christianity during his lifetime.

And yet, in light of all of this, PAUL RECEIVED THE MERCY OF GOD IN CHRIST. That is what mercy is, undeserved love, God's forgiveness in Christ, forgiveness full and free of all

transgressions, so that Paul was able to write: "I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, ... But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life." Paul received God's mercy in order to SHARE GOD'S MERCY WITH ALL.

God has showered His mercy upon you, O sinner! Each of us can relate with Paul, in saying that we are chief of sinners. You have blasphemed against God in using unholy language. You have raised up for yourself other gods, idols such as popularity, fortune, and self at the expense of God and His place in your life. You have harmed God's Church and cause by your apathy and indifference to His saving work and will. The Apostle Paul's point is this, if God can be gracious and merciful to him, He certainly can be merciful and forgiving to you.

And He has! For while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly, the saying is worth saying again and is worthy of all acceptance: CHRIST CAME INTO THIS WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS, HE CAME TO SAVE YOU!

This salvation has been given to you in Baptism. Just as God had chosen Paul for service, so also God has chosen you in the waters of your Baptism, forgiving you your sins and purchasing your very life. Your life has been bought with a price, not with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus, all so that YOU MAY BE HIS OWN AND SERVE HIM IN EVERLASTING RIGHTEOUSNESS, INNOCENCE, AND BLESSEDNESS.

Your standing with God doesn't depend upon you, it all depends on Jesus. What is your view of God? The scowling judge waiting to convict you? The disapproving parent whose love you have to earn? Your view of God affects every decision and relationship in your life. Kathleen Chesto wrote to Catholic Digest to tell them about an incident that occurred in her family. Her five-year-old child approached her one day in the kitchen and asked, "Mom is God a grown-up

or a parent?" Mom was a little puzzled by the question. "I'm not sure what you mean," she said. "Is there a difference between a grown-up and a parent?" "Oh yes," her five-year-old answered quickly. "Grown-ups love you when you are good and parents love you anyway."

This may seem overly simplistic, but the fact of the matter is that many Christians haven't really come to appreciate or accept God's unconditional love in Jesus Christ. Some mistakenly still try to earn their way to heaven, others think of God as a traffic cop in the sky, looking to bust you if He finds you stepping out of line. Dear friend, God's love doesn't depend of what you do, it all depends on God's mercy, it all depends on what God has done for you in Jesus Christ. Listen to God in His Word: (I John 4: 10): "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Sadly, we are like Charlie Brown in the old Peanuts comic strip. In one strip, Lucy comes up to Charlie Brown and does something that is very unusual for her. She says, "I love you." But Charlie Brown keeps responding by saying, "No, you don't." And each time Lucy answers a little louder, "Yes I do, I really love you." But Charles Brown has been rejected so many times he keeps saying, "It can't be true." So in the last square, Lucy has reached the limit of her patience and she screams out in a loud voice, "Hey stupid, I love you!"

Hey sinner, God loves you! He has shown mercy to you! Hear it, believe in it, and let that mercy sink to the very bottom of your soul. Just as God chose Paul to show mercy, so also He has chosen you to show mercy, that you might not only freely receive mercy, but freely share His mercy with others. The Church and this congregation is God's Mercy Place, a place where we receive mercy, so that we are empowered to SHARE GOD'S MERCY WITH OTHERS.

Note well what Martin Luther says about our task: "we are to render acts of mercy....Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself gave us the brightest example....when He took upon Himself the penalty of our sins that we might be saved. And while we have the duty of visit and console all who are

afflicted with sickness, we are especially obligated those of the household of faith.” (LW. 42:122).

All too often we get all caught up in an individualistic type of Christianity which plaques the American Christian Church, a just me and Jesus mentality. However, in the Lord’s Supper, Christ in mercy gives us Himself so that we might be empowered to give ourselves in mercy to others. Listen again to Luther: “There your heart must go out in love and devotion and learn that this sacrament is a sacrament of love, and that love and service are given to you and you again must render love and service to Christ and His needy ones. You must feel with sorrow all the dishonor done to Christ in His holy Word, all the misery of Christendom, all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing; you must fight, work, and pray, and if you cannot do more, heave heartfelt sympathy.” (LW 35:54).

Christ’s Church and this congregation is a Mercy Place.

A mother once approached Napoleon seeking a pardon for her son. The emperor replied that the young man had committed a certain offense twice and justice demanded death.

"But I don't ask for justice," the mother explained. "I plead for mercy."

"But your son does not deserve mercy," Napoleon replied.

"Sir," the woman cried, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask for."

"Well, then," the emperor said, "I will have mercy." And he spared the woman's son.

God has spared not His only Son, but given Him up for us all, that having received God’s mercy; we would freely share God’s mercy, in the name of Christ! May God make us a merciful people, freely sharing His mercy with all! Amen