



2016 World Youth Day

'Let yourself be touched by God's mercy'

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What's wonderful about this event is that the spirit of God is at work. Yesterday Cardinal Dolan was saying that "now is the time to make a decision". He gave a very powerful speech and at the end an Australian bishop said to him that he'd brought a woman to World Youth Day who was grappling with the decision of whether or not she should become a Catholic. "It was here, during your talk, that she was moved to make the decision to become a Catholic," the Australian bishop said to Cardinal Dolan. This is a sign that the spirit of God is at work at World Youth Day. Only yesterday I was talking with a friend of mine from Melbourne, who was saying that a person who had injured herself while walking and was denied any further help from a taxi driver due to road closures was offered to be piggy backed back to the place where she was staying by another pilgrim. "I will take you on my back," the woman was told by this young man. This, also, is a sign that the spirit of God is among us.

We need to ask the Lord for open our arms and hearts. At the Commissioning Mass before leaving from Perth I said to the young people there "God will want to do something, I don't know what it is, but He will say something special to each one of you while you're away". I'm convinced that that is true. Maybe it has happened to you already, maybe it'll happen at home, but God has something to say to each and every one of you. So be open.

Yesterday the theme was 'now is the time'. Today the theme is 'let yourself be touched by God's mercy'. I want to talk a bit about what it looks like when you get touched by God's mercy. To do that, I want to talk about three Gospels. These are God's inspired words.

I do want say a few things before that. None of you know me. I became the Archbishop in Perth four years ago and I remember that during the Mass when I was installed, I threw out a challenge to the Archdiocese. I want to throw that challenge out to you, especially in the context of this idea of letting yourselves be touched by God's mercy.

I remember once hearing the Superior General of a large Christian congregation, who was talking to the head of all the religious orders and saying to them, "the greatest challenge facing religious life today is to return religious life to Christ, and return Christ to religious life". That's a funny thing to say. You can imagine all the religious priests and brothers thinking 'Jesus is already at the heart of our lives'. You might say the same, but what I want to say to you, as you might say to yourself, is "is He really, is he really at the heart of our lives".

So I took that saying, I changed it around a little bit and I said, "The greatest challenge facing the Catholics in this Archdiocese, is to return the Catholic Church to Christ and return Christ to the Church." In theory, He's always there. But in practice, in my life as an individual Catholic, as a



member of a parish community, youth group or Archdiocese, is He really? If someone walked into our group without knowing us, would they know that Jesus is at the heart of everything? I want you to take this from World Youth Day. Is Jesus really at the heart and centre of everything we know about? And would people know it because it's so obvious? I want to invite you to put Jesus at the heart of what we're doing this morning. Put him at the heart of everything we're doing here in Krakow. At the heart of whatever you do when you get home, but most importantly, when you get home, you can gather people around you and say, how can we put Jesus back where He belongs. Because when the Church goes wrong, when the Church gets into a bit of a mess, and we all know that, around the world, the Church is in a bit of a mess in certain respects, because of the abuse crisis. When the Church loses sight of what it's all about, or who it's all about, that's when things can start to unravel.

The other thing I want to do, because we're in the homeland of St John Paul II, is to remind you that JP II said something that is very important and I invite you to carry it with you in your own hearts. He wrote a letter, 15 years ago, to launch the Church in the third millennium. What he said, which stood out to me, was "start afresh from Christ", today, start afresh from Christ. And he also talked about all the challenges the Church faces, all the opportunities we have to evangelise and share our faith, but he said, "our witness to Christ would be hopelessly inadequate if we ourselves have not first contemplated the face of Christ". I want you to embark on a journey with me, as we gaze on the face of Christ, touching people with his mercy. As we do, I want you to say to yourself: how am I like this person, what is it about this person that might help me to understand what the merciful touch of Christ looks like or could look like in my life?

The Gospel of Zacchaeus

The first story I want to talk about is the story of Zacchaeus. This is the story of when Jesus is visiting a small town and crowds gather to see Him, a bit like people want a glimpse of the Pope here in Krakow. Zacchaeus was a tax collector, he worked for the Romans and was very unpopular. He's rejected, despised, marginalised. He's also very short. Not just small in size, small in spirit, generosity and honesty.

Jesus doesn't reprimand him. He simply says, 'I'm coming to have dinner with you tonight.' Jesus had this instinctive understanding that Zacchaeus was isolated, lonely, dejected, despised and marginalised. So in his wisdom and sensitivity, Jesus thinks 'what's the best thing I can do to help this man understand that no matter what he's done, he's still loved, cherished, worth something?' So for Zacchaeus, Jesus did exactly the right thing to get through to him, in his situation. He showed Zacchaeus that he was loved, forgiven, that he could be healed and could change his life around. Had Jesus come and condemned and chastised him, or got mad at him, it would've just been more of the same. Zacchaeus gets used to that, he gets it all the time. But Jesus, with his infinite understanding of humanity, finds a way to say to this man: I care about you, I love you, I understand where you're coming from. The interesting thing about that story is that Jesus doesn't need to tell Zacchaeus to turn his life around. Zacchaeus just does so.

Zacchaeus then says, 'If I've cheated anyone I will pay them back fourfold,' and much more. Because Jesus met him with compassion, with sensitivity and with understanding. Not with condemnation. Zacchaeus was able to turn his life around. To receive the touch of mercy because Jesus did it in a way that Zacchaeus needed him to do it.



So there's two reflections: in what ways might I be like Zacchaeus? In what way might I be a small person? Small in my heart. Small in my generosity. It's good to acknowledge those things, not to despair about them. Because Jesus will step into our lives in our own time and in his own way and offer us the gift of mercy just as he offered it to Zacchaeus.

The Adulterous woman

Another story of Jesus touching someone with mercy featured yesterday in the catechesis during Mass. The story of the woman caught in adultery. It is very powerful. Jesus is in the temple, preaching. Someone comes barging in and says 'this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, the law of Moses says she has to be stoned to death, what do you say?' You realised straight away that from the point of view of the religious leaders that they couldn't care less that she's committing adultery, they use her as a perfect victim so that they can get at Jesus. They are vicious men. They are far worse sinners than the woman, there's a viciousness about them.

The want to trap Jesus: If Jesus says to stone the woman, they will say 'see how callous he is.' If he stops them, they will say 'see how unfaithful he is to the Law of Moses.' Then Jesus starts writing in the dirt. What I think he's doing is, he's trying to give these men a chance to come to their senses. Stop and think of what you're doing. He says 'let the one with no sin, cast the first stone.' He draws again. That's an important detail. He doesn't go one by one, He wants to get them thinking, He's being merciful to them too.

He then stands because one by one, they had left. He got through to their conscience. They realised that they couldn't throw the first stone, they weren't perfect, so they left. Jesus lifts the woman up and says, 'where are they? Has no one condemned you?' Then he says, 'I don't condemn you either.'

When we think of our own lives, Jesus wants us to hear him say to us: 'I'm not in the business of condemning you. I don't condemn you. Go and don't sin again.'

For a woman who's been abused, ridiculed, humiliated and ashamed, the one thing she needed to hear from Jesus Christ is 'I don't condemn you'. What a touching moment that must've been. Maybe like Zacchaeus that moment was the beginning of her turning her life around.

What I really want to emphasise is this: people reflecting on this story tend to focus on one or other of the things that Jesus says. Lots of people focus on the 'I don't condemn you' part. People think Jesus is saying 'do whatever you like because I don't care.' Other people focus on the 'go and don't sin again' part, as if Jesus is saying to that woman 'don't you dare do that again'.

What I think is really important is the order in which Jesus says these things. This is where the touch of mercy comes in. The first thing He says to this woman who is being condemned by all is 'I don't condemn you.' That creates in the heart of this woman the space to be able to hear the next thing that Jesus says: 'go and sin no more.' The sensitivity of Jesus. The incredible ability to read the situation and know what each person needs in their situation in order for them to have a chance to move forward. That is the touch of mercy. That is what he's saying to us: we're going to need these sensitive hearts if we're going to be able to touch others with mercy or allow the Lord through us to touch others with mercy.



Saint Peter

One more thing that I would like to talk about is the way in which the mercy of God comes to us.

St Peter is one of my favourite saints. He's a great role model for us. Peter is always the one who makes mistakes: he's impetuous, loud, rash.

We're talking about the worst moment in Peter's life, he is around the fire and people say 'you're that guy'. Peter says he doesn't know who they're talking about. Three times this happens. This was the closest disciple of Jesus. This person denied he knew Jesus. A moment of cowardice and betrayal. Perhaps for some of us there have been moments of cowardice and betrayal, with friends and family or in relation to our faith. We don't want to be known as Catholics. Or we're embarrassed about it because none of our friends seem to think this stuff matters, so we pretend it's not important to us either. Cowardice and betrayal can be important to each of us.

As predicted by Jesus, the cock crew three times. Peter, broken hearted, wept. That's always a good start to a new beginning, to be honest enough to recognise what we've done. So we know that story. The Gospel writer then says 'Jesus looked at Peter'. You can just imagine what passed between their eyes. Disappointment in the eyes of Jesus. That at this most crucial time in his life, he was betrayed by one of the ones whom he had chosen and taken into his confidence. To be betrayed by a friend is thought.

Jump forward to after resurrection. Jesus and Peter encounter each other on the shore of the lake. I want to focus on when Jesus takes Peter aside and says to him; 'Peter, do you love me?' Peter says 'yes, I love you.' Jesus says: 'feed my sheep.'

Again Jesus asks 'Peter do you really love me?' Peter says 'Yes I really love you.' 'Look after my sheep'. For a third time: 'do you love me even more than all the others?' Peter answers 'Lord you know everything, you know that I love you.' Sometimes rightly we focus on the feed by my sheep part (Peter did become the leader of the Church) but the key thing to notice in terms of the powerfully sensitive touch of mercy that comes out of the heart of Jesus is that Jesus gives Peter three chances to redeem his three betrayals. That's why Jesus asks him three times. Jesus knows that Peter's heart has been wounded. And if he's to be the man who Jesus needs him to be, Peter needs to know that he's forgiven. He needs to know that he can turn things around and make up for those three dreadful failures. So three times Jesus says to him: 'do you love me?' Each time he says 'yes lord I love you' it's as if he's untying the knot of his betrayals. The sensitive touch of the mercy of Jesus.

Today the theme of the catechesis and of World Youth Day is 'let yourself be touched by God's mercy'. So, in what ways am I like Zacchaeus? Like that woman thrown at the feet of Jesus caught in adultery? How am I like Peter? How am I like those three people?

What's the story of my failures and my betrayals? They couldn't be greater than the failures of these three people. Yet nothing stopped Jesus from forgiving, but offering hope and a new beginning and a new way forward. If he did it for them, why wouldn't he do it for us? So, back to where I started, return Christ to his rightly place in your life. Hand your life to him. Let Him be for you the same loving and sensitive and compassionate and merciful Lord that He was for those people and for so many other people in the Gospel. Let yourselves be touched by God's mercy.