

Lenten Reflection

Wednesday, February 17, 2016

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“Even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart for I am gracious and merciful.”

These are the words of today’s Gospel Acclamation, ones we also heard on Ash Wednesday. In fact, every Ash Wednesday we hear the same passage from the Prophet Joel, starting with Chapter 2, Verse 12. What happened in verses 1-11? It is in these verses we hear about the day of the Lord, essentially the end of the world, and it sounds ominous: fire, darkness, gloom, earthquakes, and absence of sun, moon and stars. Verse 11 ends with these words: “How great is the day of the Lord! Utterly terrifying! Who can survive it?”

And then God give us words of assurance. If we turn our hearts to God, we will receive grace and mercy. We will not perish, because our God is a loving God and wants to dwell within us.

In this Jubilee Year of Mercy, perhaps we can take this invitation from God to the “next level.” Just as God offers grace and mercy, so we should extend that gift to others. Let us welcome the strangers- the immigrants, those with different beliefs than ours, those who are estranged from our church family. Let us reach out to the outcasts (as defined by today’s society) - the homeless, the poor, those who have physical and mental disabilities. Let us help those who need healing- victims of human trafficking, people who have been in abusive relationships, people who are unemployed or underemployed. Some of these people may be our own family members, our friends, or our neighbors. Some may be complete strangers to us. Perhaps you even gaze upon this person in the mirror every day, for each of us has a great need for the grace and mercy only God can provide.

Can we accept the invitation, “Return to me”? May we be open to all the possibility found in such simple words.