

Tape 9 - Behold The Lamb

The Lamb of God, in scripture and in this aberration at Nark, is ultimately a symbol of divine reality. Seeing, through Jesus Christ, the Lamb is Jesus Christ. The Lamb of God points to the salvific mercy of God in Jesus. The salvific mercy of God in Jesus. In other words, the Lamb points to God. We must remember God is everything. There is no second or third, certainly there is nothing comparable. God is everything. Earlier on we talked about Jesus' revelation of as God Father. What I'd like to begin today's reflection on the Lamb of God, which requires a reflection on God, is I'd like to begin by quoting a few passages from Pope John Paul II's encyclical, *Redemptio Hominum*, rich in mercy. In this encyclical, which I think is the finest thing he ever wrote, he opens it up, the very first sentence is, "it is God who is rich in mercy whom Jesus Christ has revealed to us as Father." It is God who is rich in mercy that Jesus Christ has revealed to us as Father. Making the Father present as love and mercy is in Jesus' own consciousness the fundamental touchstone of his mission as Messiah.

In human history love must be revealed above all as mercy, and must also be actualized as mercy. Christ messianic program, the program of mercy becomes the program of his people, the program of the church. And finally, the church must bear witness to the mercy of God revealed in Jesus. The church must bear witness to the mercy of God revealed in Jesus in the whole of his mission as Messiah, professing it as the salvific truth of faith and as necessary for life in harmony with faith, and seeking to make it incarnate in the lives of both her faithful and all people of good will. The church live an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy, the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and the Redeemer. There couldn't be a more comprehensive statement about the place of mercy in the church, the place of mercy in the plan of God and the place of mercy in the teaching and the life and the purpose of Jesus' mission.

Mercy, as the Pope says, is the messianic program and therefore is to be the program of the church. It is to be actualized in history by the church. And what's the mercy, it is the mercy of God who is Father and who is rich in mercy. And when the Pope says, it is the most stupendous attribute of God, of the Creator and the Redeemer, it would seem automatic that if this is the most tremendous attribute of the Creator and the Redeemer, mercy, if this is why Jesus became Messiah, to proclaim the Father who is rich in mercy, than what would follow automatically is that every Christian life should proclaim this above all else, the mercy of God. That when people see Christians they should know Christians by the fact that these are people who live in mercy, who live out of mercy and who live for doing mercy. It is God who is rich in mercy that Jesus has revealed to us as Father, making the Father present as love and mercy is Jesus own consciousness the fundamental touchstone of his mission as Messiah, says John Paul II.

But is mercy the fundamental touchstone of our Christian existence, or is something else the fundamental touchstone? If we are to follow Christ, if we are to put on the mind of Christ, if we are to imitate, if we are to love as Christ loved, than doesn't the fundamental touchstone of Christ mission have to be the fundamental touchstone of our mission in the world? Proclaiming the Father as mercy, not just mercy but rich in mercy is the fundamental touchstone of his mission as Messiah. How can our mission as Christians be any different? Now there are a lot of things that Christians are known for. There are a lot of priorities that we can have. We can order our lives around all kinds of things, but the reality is that what John Paul II is saying is, Jesus as the

fundamental touchstone of his mission was to proclaim mercy. Jesus was the reflection of divine mercy. Above all he was the reflection of divine mercy, and therefore, we as Christians, we as followers of Jesus, we as followers of the Lamb, Christians must be reflections of divine mercy. That that is a priority category in the Christian life. Not something we get around to after we've gotten what we want in the world. Well, we'll do a little mercy. This is the commitment of the Christian life, to reflect the mercy of God made visible in Jesus Christ. This is the heart of Christ life therefore it has to be the heart of the individual Christian's life, therefore it has to be the heart of the church life. Why? Because ultimately it is the heart of God's life. It is the most stupendous attribute of the Creator, mercy.

When human beings encounter us as Christians, is there first impression that we are merciful people? When a human being encounters you or I, is there first impression that we are a merciful person, or could someone spend five days with us and never think we are a merciful person? We may be other things. We may be smart, we may be good looking, we may be well dressed, we may be rich, we may be clever, we may be mad, we may be furious, we may be self-righteous, and all these things would come across. But the fundamental touchstone of our baptismal life has to be the same as the fundamental touchstone of Jesus' life, that we are reflections of divine mercy.

Now, when we think of mercy, it seems to me that there is no more important passage that you and I have to reflect on, and not that there aren't many, many passages. There is no more important passage that you and I have to reflect on when we think of mercy in the gospels, and therefore mercy in the teaching of Jesus, and therefore mercy in our lives than Matthew 25:31, starting at 31. It is a passage that we all know. It reads like this, when the Son of man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory and all the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separate sheep from goats. And he will put his sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, come you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. Then the righteous will answer, Lord where did we see you hungry and give you food, thirsty and give you drink, and when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you? And the King will answer and say to them, truly I tell you just as you did it to one of these least you did it unto me. Then he will say to those on his left hand, you that are a cursed depart from me into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, for I was hungry and you did not give me to eat, I was thirsty and you did not give me to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me. Then they will answer and say oh Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger, naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you? And he will answer them and say, truly I tell you just as you did not do it to one of these the least you did not do it to me. And these will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

Now there is no doubt, no doubt at all that that passage is the teaching of Jesus. Not necessarily the very words, but it is authentic Jesus' teachings. Pope John Paul II in his encyclical,

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The reality of the matter is that with every gift that is given there is a responsibility. Baptism is, by definition, a gift. We are chosen and we are chosen to reflect in this world what Jesus, the Lamb of God, reflects, and that is divine mercy. The Pope, the messianic program, consists in the revelation of merciful love for the poor, the suffering, the prisoner, for the blind, for the oppressed, for the sinner. We are to be a people of mercy. This is not a minor thing that we are about. This is the major thing we are about, because this is the revelation of God as Father, as a Father rich in mercy. In other words, you and I, by the choice made by God and Jesus to give us the gift of faith, we have been chosen, chosen to be a merciful person and to be merciful people. We have been given access in the sacraments, through the church, through the scriptures, through where God placed us in existence, we have been given access to mercy incarnate, Jesus Christ. We have been given access to prayer, through prayer to mercy incarnate. We have been given access to a conversation with mercy incarnate.

When we listen to that passage of Matthew 25, one of the things that can occur to us is, besides the mercy shown to those who show mercy there is a second half of that passage that those who did not show mercy, those who spent their time on other priorities -- it doesn't say what they were, it might have been studying, it might have been tinkering in the garden, it might have been all kinds of things -- but those who had other priorities than mercy, something else is going on in their lives, in time and in eternity. The passage is called the last judgement passage. Biblical judgement is not God sitting up there like a district court judge saying, let me see, here's the record of your life, you did this, this and this, but on the other hand you were kind to this person and helped across the street, therefore we'll give you a lesser sentence. Biblical judgement is not so infantile, not so unserious. Biblical judgement is the human being or the human community judges itself. As they think, as they speak and as they do, so they become. A person who pours down a fifth of booze or a quart of alcohol, a quart of whiskey every night for 15 years and when the snakes come over the top of the bed and the DT's it's not God doing it. It's the consequence of choices made. Biblical judgement is about we becoming something in the process of choosing. How many people do you know, Christian people perhaps, that look for God, know God, even pray to God, but maybe they've told you or you've heard that they go through all this and they don't even know if God exists. Or they put a whole life into praying for God and they are terrorized of Him.

Dostoyofsky was a Russian writer and he wrote a book called, Brother Caramozof, series of stories. One of the stories in the middle of Brother Caramozof is something called the Lady of Little Faith. In this little story this middle-aged woman thinks she is going to die. She's been a very pious Russian Orthodox lady, but she thinks she's going to die, she's middle-aged. And all of a sudden it occurs to her that she doesn't believe at all. That all the motions that she has been going through, she doesn't believe in them. She doesn't even believe in God, she doesn't even

know if there is a God and she becomes terrified. And so she goes to see Father Zozima. Father Zozima, is Dostoyofsky's character for being the epitome of the Christian life. She's the holy man of Russian, a monk, and she goes to see Zozima and she tells Zozima that she's going to die or she thinks she is going to die and she says, she doesn't know if God even exists. She's terrified, she doesn't know what's going to happen to her, she might just die and just become one of the blades of grass, just disappear. And she's in total confusion after 45 years of Russian Orthodox piety. She says to Zozima, you must prove to me that God exists, that God loves me and my soul is immortal. I must know it, you are the holy man, you are the friend, you must prove to me that God exists, God loves me and that my soul is immortal. And Zozima says to her, I can't prove to you that God exists or that God loves you or that your soul's immortal, and anyone who tells you that they can prove to you that God exists, that God loves you and that your soul is immortal is fooling you, is lying to you, it cannot be done. And the woman collapses in anguish, in absolute terror and anguish at what's going to become of her. Then Zozima says, I can't prove to you that God exists, that God loves you or that your soul is immortal, but I can show you a way to become certain of it. And she looks up at him and all of a sudden there is a light of hope. She wants a logical proof, a mind proof, a mental proof that God exists, that God loves her and that her soul is immortal. Zozima says, no such thing exists, but he can show her a way to become certain God exists, God loves her, and that her soul is immortal. And she gets up and she says how? And he says, begin to perform little Christ-like deeds of love and mercy and you will grow in the assurance that God exists, that God loves you and that your soul is immortal. Certainty of God's existence, God's love and that one is eternally attached to God doesn't come from logical proofs, doesn't come from reading theology and books and magazines. Zozima says it comes from one thing, do Christ-like mercy. The tiniest little -- begin he says, little deed, begin to perform little deeds of Christ-like mercy and you will become certain of it.

What's that all about? What that is about is this, as I participate in a reality I know a reality. As I participate in a life of mercy I am participating in the life of God. As I participate in the life of God I begin to know God. In the front of our liturgy books that we use here at the Byzantine liturgy each day, the priest uses on the altar, the first sentence is, God is love. Not in that love comes from God, love is God. Participate, participate in the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and the Redeemer, mercy and you will know that God exists, God loves you and that your soul is immortal. It's kind of like, if we can use our imaginations a little, it's kind of like you had a situation, make-believe situation, but you had a hypothetical situation where a person never saw water, never touched water. They've seen pictures of it, they had read poetry about it, they had heard about it, they knew the chemistry of it, they may even have a Ph.D. in water, but they never, never touched water. And so one day someone takes them down to the lake and they walk into the lake and, ah, water, that's water, that's water.

Knowledge of a reality by immersion in the reality. That's what Zozimer is saying.

End of Side A, Beginning of Side B

How much of the life of the individual Christian in the church, in general has been taken up with something other than mercy? In some other ways to find God, other than mercy? Whether it be through books or paranormal phenomena, but mercy is the life of God and it's available to us to

enter into any moment we want to enter into it. So we know, we can be sitting alone in a church or alone in our home and we can do mercy because we can pray for those, for example, that need prayers. That's using our life up for others, for trying to do good for them when they are in need, that is mercy. Prayer can be a form of mercy. There may be all kinds of other things we can do. There's literally an infinite variety of mercy available to us because there is an infinite variety of suffering out there. No one can respond to it all, but everyone has a full day's schedule.

And so, we think, you know, as I look in the back of the chapel here and see the picture of St. Theresa. And St. Theresa Alizier I think of all the people she has touched. Millions upon tens upon tens upon tens, billions of people by this time. And how did it happen? How did someone that died anonymously in 1897 have such a massive effect on the world? Well, if you remember the story that's recounted on page one of her autobiography, The Story of the Soul, page one paragraph one, she says that when the Mother Superior asked her to write this thing she felt that perhaps she shouldn't do it because it would make her too self conscious. But then she prayed and Jesus told her that it was alright because she would be doing nothing here then she intended to do for her whole life, indeed to do for all eternity, "to sing of the mercies of God". Her life in the Carmel was a life committed to the tiny deed of Christ-like mercy. Precisely what Zozima says, and the enormous power that went out from that. And so here we are, we are literally surrounded, you and I, we are literally surrounded by a world of victims, people suffering. The planet is on fire with pain of all kinds, mental, physical, moral, spiritual, who knows. And what Jesus says and what the Pope says is that everyone of those victims can be a sacrament for us, can be a way of encountering the real God. I was hungry, were did we see you. I was hungry and you gave me to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me to drink. I was homeless and you brought me in. I was naked and you clothed me. These are just little forms of people who have been victims, who have suffered, who are suffering, and everyone of them we respond to in mercy becomes a way of encountering the mercy of God. The attitude that Jesus teaches, blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.

Once again we've distorted it like a district court judge. Blessed are the merciful, well you've done this, this and this, but on the other hand you helped someone over here. Has nothing to do with that. It has to do with Biblical judgement on the positive side, and that is do mercy and you will receive the greatest of all mercies, you will know that God is mercy, God loves you and that you are safe. The person who is the victim, that person is a sacrament, that person is an opportunity to encounter God, to serve God, but to receive the greatest of all the gifts, to receive the knowledge that God is mercy, that God loves you and that you're eternally safe. Pope John Paul II says, it is not just a case of fulfilling a commandment or an obligation of an ethical nature to do mercy. It is a case of satisfying a condition of major importance for God to reveal himself to humanity. For God to reveal himself as mercy to humanity. The merciful shall obtain mercy. Mercy comes with giving mercy. But the other side is equally true. If I refuse to step in the water regardless of how much I've studied about water, read poetry about water, sung about water, if I refuse to step in the water I can never know water. If I choose the abstract pictures of water and dissertations about water, and chemical formulas about water over the reality of water I don't know all the good things about water. If I choose to find God by something other than participating in the life of God, then I do not immerse myself in the reality, and the reality is not mine to know. I have made a choice.

And so, we are here and we are talking about God. But when we Christians talk about God, we are not talking about a killer God we are talking about a God of life. We are not talking about a God that crushes, we're talking about a God of mercy. We're not talking about a God that destroys, we're talking about a God that saves and that wishes to save everyone. Pope John Paul II, in reality the one who gives mercy is always and also a beneficiary. Serve the victim, serve God in the victim and you have to be serving yourself. In reality, says the Pope, the one who gives mercy is always and also a beneficiary. An act of merciful love is only really such when we are deeply convinced at the moment that we perform it that we are at the same time receiving mercy from the people who are accepting it from us. If this bilateral and reciprocal quality is absent, our actions are not yet acts of mercy. Do you see what he is saying? He is saying when we serve people who are suffering, the consciousness that we have to serve them with is, this is the merciful God giving us the opportunity in his mercy to know him. We are not above here and the poor victim down here. The poorest person in the world is the person that doesn't know God, and God is giving the person who is well the opportunity through the person who is ill, whatever the victimization may be, to meet him, to meet God by being merciful to this one. That is the one who gives mercy, says the Pope, is always the beneficiary. Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.

This is our life, this isn't a secondary part of our life. This isn't a number two priority. This is the Christian life, to immerse ourselves whether we are in the grocery store, at home, with our families in the church, regardless of who we are talking to, to be instruments, reflections of the mercy of God. Not just to friends, not just to friends but to enemies. Listen to the Pope, mercy is manifest in its true and proper aspect when it promotes and draws good from all forms of evil existing in the world. Understood in this way, mercy constitutes the fundamental content of the messianic mission of Christ. Once more, mercy is manifest in its true and proper aspect when it promotes and draws good from all forms of evil existing in the world. That's what we've been saying. When the response to evil done to you is to return good to the evildoer, to be merciful towards the evildoer. This, says the Pope, is the high point of mercy in the human situation. This he says constitutes the fundamental content of the messianic mission of Christ. Usually when people do us evil, we do evil back. You say a bad word about me, I'll say it about you. You hit me -- an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. The Pope says something different. To have evil on us and to return good, to be merciful even towards the victimizer, that this here constitutes the fundamental content of the messianic message.

Not in vain, says the Pope, did Christ challenge his listeners. Faithful to the Old Testament teaching of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, this was a distortion of justice. At that time and today the same, justice alone is not enough. To say it in terms of technical Catholic theology, justice is compatible with hatred. Justice does not save. You can go to court, you can get all the justice there is to get and you could come out of that court the winner and you could hate the other party. You have full justice and you have hate, quite compatible. Only love saves. You know, in terms of the mercy and the power of the mercy or returning good for evil, showing mercy to the victimizer, it seems to me that of course the one great instance of that is Jesus on the cross where he prays for those who are destroying him. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. He searches for a way to bring God's mercy down upon those who are destroying him, his victimizers. But there is another moment in the gospel that is important, every bit as important as that moment. And that's Getsimitee. In Getsimitee we know that Jesus

has no death wish. He is not some fanatic searching out death. We know from the story that he is sweating blood, he's praying on the ground, he actually says, if possible let this cup pass from me, but your will not mine be done. We know he wants out if it's possible. He doesn't want to go through this horrendous death. And then we see, coming to the Mount of Olives, a group of people led by the armed servant of the high priest, and there's tortures in the darkness and so forth and so on, just flames and light you know. And there's a fight that breaks out, and it's a real fight because it says Peter cuts off the ear of the armed servant of the high priest. Now when you cut off an ear you're only about a half an inch away from splitting the skull open. We're talking about real fighting here, murderous fighting. Now, it seems to me, just my thought process on this, it seems to me that we're looking at here one of the great events in human history. A presentation of the truth of the gospel and the mercy of God and the authenticity of Jesus that is just overwhelming. Jesus wants out, he doesn't want to be tormented and tortured to death, but he does want to do the will of the Father, he says that. But if there's a way out, give it to me. The fight breaks out, the ear is cut off. In the middle of this Jesus has his opportunity to flee. There's arguing, there's fighting, there's confusion, he can just go and there is no reason that he shouldn't go except this man on the ground. You can be as tough as nails, but when they cut your ear off you're a whimpering child. A nurse once told me, who works in the Emergency Ward in a big city in the United States, she says it's shocking how many people come into the Emergency Ward, teenagers, people in their 20's and 30's and they've been shot and they are screeching in agony and one of the things they say is, it's not supposed to be like this. Their impression of being shot is from television. They don't realize that when you open up the nervous system to raw air and everything else you go crazy with pain. This man on the ground is going crazy with pain, the armed servant of the high priest. And what does Jesus do? Instead of escaping Jesus knows that he has the power to heal unlike anyone who has ever walked on the face of the Earth. He may wish at this moment he didn't, but he's got this gift from God and there is one of God's children. Someone that God loves, someone that God who has loved drew out of nothingness and loves to that instant, and he knows that the enemy of the state is not the enemy of God but a child of God to be loved like God loves him. He knows his enemy, this man that's going to take him to his death is not the enemy of God but is a child of God who is loved by God. For three years he has been preaching mercy. Mercy even to the enemy. Love your enemy, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute you. If your enemy is hungry, give him to eat. If he's thirsty, give him to drink. He's been preaching it and now his enemy, the one who is going to take him to his death, and he has the power to do God's will and to love and be merciful in the moment or to leave. And he walks over and he heals the ear of the armed servant of the high priest, the man who's going to take him to his death. He returns mercy and good for evil. It looks like a totally false decision, wrong decision, except if he ran we wouldn't be here today. He was not looking to die, he was proclaiming again by deed what Pope John Paul II says in the opening line of his encyclical, It is God who is rich in mercy that Jesus has revealed to us as Father. He was proclaiming the mercy of God even over and against the evil that was coming at him. He was returning good for evil. He was not, he said put up the sword, he was not dealing in an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

And so, we know that this is the teaching of Jesus. We now how the world works. The world works when Peter cuts off the ear, the world says mercilessly, Peter get the other ear. That's what the world says, but Jesus says put up your sword and he walks over and he does good to those who are going to victimize him, not because he thinks anything good is going to come out

of it for him. But for the same reason that it says in Matthew 25, there is someone who is hurt who is a child of God that needs to be loved and God gave me the power at this moment to do it. This is my life, mercy. Now, I again read you that critical passage from Pope John Paul's encyclical, "Mercy is manifest in its true and proper aspect when it promotes and draws good from all forms of evil." We do not respond to evil with evil. Now we're talking about Jesus, but let me talk about your husband or wife. Let me talk about the superior. When someone does something to you, whatever it is, it makes no difference, that really hurts you know, maybe even unjustly or maybe inadvertently, what is your response? Is it the response that says, wonderful someone did something bad to me? I'm a victim, this gives me a chance to do mercy. Or is it, I'm not going to put up with that stuff? I'll straighten her out. And this is one of the things that totally broke down, totally broke down with the so called Constantian change in the church. The centrality of God as Father who is rich in mercy. The proclamation of that became the proclamation of God in the image and likeness of the emperor, king, someone who terrorized, punished. You kept the rules exactly this way or you were in trouble. But not rich in mercy. Not willing to go all over the world to find the one sinner and bring him back. Not the God who says to the thief on the cross and says, just remember me when you come into your kingdom. A man who thinks he's so bad he should be put to death and all he says is remember me when you come into your kingdom. And Garsis says stay you will be with me in paradise. Talk about rich in mercy. That's the God that is our God, but that's the God that's supposed to be our life because we're baptized in Christ. Make no mistake about it. I know a lot of people here, like myself, probably say the divine mercy chaplets and that's right and that's proper and that's good, but the entire divine mercy message from Jesus to Sister Falstina, if you believe it, is focused on the deed of mercy. The chaplet is not sufficient, it couldn't be sufficient. You have to be given over to be merciful to people as God is merciful to you.

And of course we know the aberration here at Nark is the Lamb of God. Everyday in Mass three times over we emphasize, or twice over we emphasize and say it over and over and over again as a little ejaculation, Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. But if it's mercy we want, it's mercy we should give. If it's mercy we desire, it's mercy what others desire. Today's gospel says, the measure you measure with is the measure you will receive. Don't measure with justice, measure with mercy, super abundant mercy, rich in mercy like God. So what, what have you got lose. Don't measure with justice, measure like Christ measures. Return mercy for evil. Blessed are the merciful, they will receive mercy. Forget justice, as the Pope says, it is not enough. There is not one person here today, including myself, that's going to come to the moment of their death saying, Lord have justice on me. We will all be saying Lord have mercy and right out there now there are people crying out for mercy. They are there to be helped, they are there to be responded to in mercy. And don't ever be deceived that the only people that are crying out for mercy are the oppressed and the sick and the suffering. As the Pope points out, the person most deeply in need of a manifestation of mercy is the person caught in the prison of sin. Be merciful when someone does something evil to you. It's their sins, but what you need to do is not compound it, but to bring the mercy of the Lamb of God, the mercy of forgiveness in the face of evil to the situation. And then, just let the ripples go out and the reality is blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. For some day if you do that you will here, blessed are the merciful, mercy is now yours for all eternity.