

Easter Vigil Homily

Given by Fr. John Koziol, OFM Conv.
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Just a few months ago, Pope Francis inaugurated the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. In doing so, Pope Francis said that it was his ardent desire that all people come to a deeper understanding and acceptance of the unlimited mercy of God.

Pope Francis defined mercy as *“the divine attitude which embraces. It is God’s giving Himself to us, accepting us, and bowing to forgive.”* The Holy Father said: *“We can say that mercy is God’s identity card. God of Mercy, merciful God.”* Pope Francis is fond of reminding us that: *“The name of the Father is mercy.”*

God’s mercy is most perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ. *“With our eyes fixed on Jesus and his merciful gaze, we experience the love of the Most Holy Trinity. The mission Jesus received from the Father was that of revealing the mystery of divine love in its fullness.”*

God is love and mercy is God’s love in action. Jesus is God’s love in action: coming to us, loving us, giving Himself totally to us and for us, forgiving us and saving us.

This is the profound mystery we recall and celebrate tonight. This Easter Vigil liturgy recalls the incredible love story of God for His people. Tonight, we heard many stories from the Bible about God’s love and mercy, starting from the very beginning of creation itself and continuing all the way up to the resurrection of Jesus. That love story has never ended. We are a part of that love story. Up to this very moment, God invites us into a relationship with Him. Just as God called and chose people in the Bible to be His special people, He chooses each one of us. He invites us; He calls us; He wants us to be loved by Him.

God is not satisfied with a casual or platonic relationship with us. He wants a marriage relationship with us. He wants intimacy and He seeks it and thirsts for it...and so, He seeks us out. God is always the initiator of our relationship with Him. Even our desire to praise God and to know God is God’s gift to us.

Pope Francis is hoping that this Year of Mercy will help us to grow in our relationship with God; first, by reminding us of God’s desire for us. God longs for a personal relationship with each of us. Mother Teresa of Calcutta often said that Jesus thirsts for us. From the cross Jesus said, “I thirst.” Yes, He thirsts for each of us.

God invites and we respond. That is what we are doing tonight. We are all at different points in God’s love relationship with us. For some, like our children about to be baptized, the love story is just beginning. There is an excitement, even an infatuation; the relationship is new and enticing. For others, the love story has been going on for a long while. It is maturing and growing deeper and deeper. For still others, the relationship may have stalled a little bit and tonight is a night for renewal and re-igniting the spark!

Wherever you are in your love relationship with God, tonight is an invitation to deepen it and to allow God to touch you and to assure you that you are loved. God delights in you. He accepts you as you are. He loves you as you are. He has mercy on you. Receive that mercy! Feel it! Thank Him for it! Let it fill you with joy and peace....

The gift of God's love and mercy is free, but it comes with one demand. Once we have experienced God's loving mercy in our own lives, then we are called to be merciful to others. We must become Ministers of Mercy. For those who will be baptized and confirmed tonight, you must be ministers and instruments of mercy to others. This is what being a disciple of Jesus Christ is all about. We put love into action by being merciful. The Holy Spirit is given to you tonight so that you can be like Christ, who is the mercy of God in human form. May each of us be set on fire by the Holy Spirit, and may we go forth joyfully from this place to announce that Jesus is alive and that we are the instruments of His love and mercy.