



Novena of Grace 2021

Readings: 2 Chronicles 36: 14-16, 19-23 | Psalm 137: 1-6 | Ephesians 2: 4-10 | John 3: 14-21

Grace: We pray for the grace to let our hearts be touched by God's ever-present mercy.

Day Six

“Whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that their works may clearly be seen as done in God.” “Whoever....”

That strong message of Jesus to Nicodemus that we just heard this morning in the Gospel of John tells us of the importance of light, light shining in darkness, light opening my eyes to see what happening around me. Well, be sure to pay your electricity bills --otherwise you will live in darkness!

This reminds me of a clever TV advertisement that comes up almost every night when I'm watching the evening news. You may have seen it: the gentleman who is happy to leave lights **off** around his house -- everything in darkness -- because with a flick of a switch, he can illuminate his whole house, inside and outside. Bright lights chase away the darkness -- and anyone who might be hiding in that darkness!

Well, I'm thinking now more of the light I need to chase away any spiritual darkness around me, yes, any spiritual darkness within me. As we just heard now in the passage from John's Gospel, Jesus told Nicodemus that those who do wicked things hate the light, for fear that their wickedness will be exposed. But “whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that their works may clearly be seen as done in God.”

As you hear these words about light, you probably are remembering as I am the powerful message about light that the young poet Amanda Gorman recited during the recent presidential inauguration:

“When day comes we step out of the shade
Aflame and unafraid
The new dawn blooms as we free it
For there is always light,
If only we're brave enough to see it
If only we're brave enough to be it.”



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I want to share some thoughts on this 6th day of the Novena of Grace about a very special, very powerful, very beautiful light that our good God shares with us, the light of mercy. And why is mercy a light? Because it shows us so clearly what God's love is all about. The grace we especially pray for on this sixth day of the Novena is "Let our hearts be touched by God's ever-present mercy."

You and I, living in this time when the leadership, the servant leadership, of our Church is in the hands of Pope Francis, we can be strongly encouraged by his words repeated again and again, "Our God is mercy, Our God is mercy." And remember that shortly after being elected Pope, Francis was asked: "Who are you?" and he answered so readily: "I am a sinner, a forgiven sinner." He has repeated that many times, always making it clear that he is an undeserving recipient of God's ever-loving, ever-lasting mercy.

Let me honestly tell you a difficulty I had in preparing my homily, my remarks, for this morning of the sixth day of the Novena of Grace. I wanted to choose a few good quotes about mercy from Pope Francis, the Pope of Mercy. Well, I went to my favorite resource, my "homily-helper," Google, and I typed in "Pope Francis, Mercy." What came up on my screen for the next few minutes wasn't really that helpful: several hundred substantial, timely and beautiful quotes about mercy! How to choose the best one? Well, I really can't choose! So I suggest that if you can, YOU go to and type in "Pope Francis Mercy" and enjoy picking out some favorites for yourself!

To be more serious, let me share some thoughts this morning about the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Sacrament of Penance. This is what is commonly called "Confession." Many of us of an older, more mature age certainly recall confession, the every-Saturday night ritual in our local parish! But the Sacrament of Penance is not so widely approached these days and I feel sad about that.

Remember what I emphasized earlier, what Pope Francis emphasizes so strongly: our God is merciful, our God is Mercy! And in the Sacrament of Penance, we meet that merciful God, whether our sins are minor or major (what we traditionally referred to as "venial" or "mortal"). We know that mercy is not something earned, or something deserved, or something we pay for or something we seek bargain prices for. Mercy is something freely given out of love for us!



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As a priest who has the privilege of administering the Sacrament of Penance, I want to emphasize something that Pope Francis has emphasized in his encouragement that we Catholics renew our appreciation and our utilization of this sacrament. The Pope gives us a good example – you probably have seen photos of him standing or kneeling in St. Peter's in Rome to receive the Sacrament.

Francis has chosen for his prayer intention for the month of March, right now, “Let us pray that we may experience the sacrament of reconciliation with renewed depth, to taste the infinite mercy of God.” That “renewed depth” reminds us that the Sacrament of Penance is a loving and merciful encounter between us and God. It is not a court case! It is not, as Francis humorously has reminded us, like going to the dry cleaners, to get some stains on my suit removed -- one over here, three over there, five -- or is it six... or maybe seven -- there in the corner of the coat. NO! We are not in front of a dry cleaner with a chart, or a judge who keeps counting! And the priest must not be, in Francis's words, a “torturer.”

Reflecting on this Sacrament of Penance, of Reconciliation, I'm reminded of a wonderful comment made about Francis Xavier's demeanor, or style, or manner during his time in Japan. He didn't know the Japanese language that would have enabled him to share his strong message of God's mercy. But people who saw him noted that his facial expression, his welcome smile, his gentle presence, brought a stronger and more tangible message of God's merciful love to the people. That's what should go on in our encounter with the Sacrament of Penance.

So, my sisters and brothers, may we experience the Sacrament of Penance, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, with renewed depth, to taste the loving mercy of God.

We pray for the grace to let our hearts be touched by God's ever-present mercy.

Fr. Pete Henriot, S.J.
Day 6 | March 14, 2021

Reflection Questions:

Where, when, from whom and for what have I experienced forgiveness?...have I offered forgiveness?