

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A-2026

One of the things that really comforts, strengthens, heals, and empowers our hearts, is the habitual experience of being truly cared for by another person or group of people. It is like “wind beneath our wings” that helps us to soar higher than we ever imagined, both personally and spiritually.

This experience is ever more profound and dramatic when that Person is none other than God. The One who is Lord of heaven and earth. Our reading from the Book of Wisdom speaks of how God takes care of all of His people. It was this spiritual reality that inspired the psalmist in Psalm 8, to proclaim in a spirit of awe and wonder: “When I see the heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and stars that You set in place. What are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals, that You care for them? Yet You have made them little less than a god, crowned them with glory

and honor. You have given them rule over all the works of Your hands.”

I have some really amazing news. In the vast immensity of the universe and the countless members of the human family, God personally cares for each one of us individually and uniquely. We matter that much to God. Before you are too hasty in dismissing a seemingly outlandish claim, our reading from Romans reveals that the Holy Spirit searches our hearts. Since the Holy Spirit searches our hearts, God has the fullest and most intimate personal knowledge of us on a moment-by-moment basis. That means that God always knows our innermost thoughts and feelings, joys and anguish, confusion and struggles, failures and victories. We can hide some of this information from other people, but we cannot hide it from God. Since God knows us better than we know ourselves, God is the One who can care for us the most, if only we open and keep opening this inner sanctum of our hearts to Him. A spiritual writer who has fed my soul over the years invites us to convert our inner dialogue and personal experiences into an unceasing prayer

from the heart. If it matters to us, it matters to God. In this way, our heart speaks to God's heart and vice versa.

May we consciously welcome God's Spirit, into every nook and cranny of our hearts. May we be mindful that He is always with and within us. By doing so in a persevering manner, we will personally come to experience the reality of His care, from the inside out. We will encounter His loving tenderness and the power of His might, marvels, and miracles. To our joyful bewilderment, we will learn that God is all up in our personal business. He is deeply involved in the most significant and seemingly insignificant details of our lives. As the Psalmist, in Psalm 34 proclaims with a living faith: "Taste and see the goodness of the Lord." God's care is so exquisite, all embracing, attentive, and knows no rival.

Our reading from the Book of Wisdom reveals that one of the most beautiful manifestations of God's care for us is that He governs our lives and the world with a spirit of leniency and clemency. That means with a spirit of mercy. It's not a leniency that invites us to do

whatever we want and to make up our own personal faith and morality. The ultimate standard remains anchoring our lives in Jesus Christ. This anchoring includes the proper understanding of, and the living of out of, the teachings of the Bible and our Catholic Christian faith. Instead, it is a clemency that is meant to give us hope as we struggle with our various forms of sinfulness and imperfections. It is leniency that prevents us from always living downcast and crushed in spirit. It is the hope that fills our souls as we recognize that with God it is not three strikes and we are forever out of His good graces or heavenly paradise.

Every moment provides us with a chance for a new beginning. We have the daily opportunity to separate the weeds from the wheat in our hearts, until we literally draw our last breath on this side of eternity. Then we come before God to receive the eternal destiny we have freely chosen. St. Padre Pio was blessed with some amazing spiritual gifts. On more than one occasion, Jesus gave him the opportunity to see how he deals with someone who is approaching

death. Jesus revealed that He comes to a person multiple times before death to give them an opportunity for personal reconciliation. He does so whether conscious or unconscious. He visits them through inner visions, words spoken to their souls, and gentle and powerful stirrings and illuminations of the Holy Spirit within them, all while respecting free will. He witnessed people both accept and reject these final series of invitations from the Lord. This mercy of God to the very end provides us with a pervasive sense of hope as we deal with the aftermath of our most ill-advised and sinful choices, and the personal and spiritual consequences that may have flowed from them.

The mercy of God is a beacon of divine light in our human darkness that reminds and reassures us that we can always spiritually go home to God. God IS the Father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Therefore, we can take it to the bank that when we humbly recognize the error of our ways, whether great or small, and make the first movements toward coming home to Him, He will spiritually run out to greet us

through His Spirit inspiring us to draw us closer to Himself; receive us in His loving and merciful embrace through prayer and the sacrament of Reconciliation, and celebrate our return by confirming our dignity as His beloved daughters and sons through the words of absolution and our full participation within the sacramental life of the church.

This spiritual dynamic of mercy is powerfully captured in the following lyrics from the Christian artist Steve Green, in his song: “That’s Where His Mercy Begins:” “Let me tell you about mercy, it led me to this land of grace. Once I was homeless, ashamed to show my face. I deserved no gift of favor, after all I had done. You’ve all heard my story I am the prodigal son.” Later on, the lyrics state “I had run so far from Him, that all my hope was dying. But when I finally turned for home, His mercy came and showed the way.” “And He is never surprised, at where we have been. He is waiting for us at the end of our sins. And the heaven we find, from the hell we’ve been in. That’s where His mercy, that’s where His mercy begins.”

