

**09/11/16 ..... 24C**

-- Ever since John Paul established the date, we've observed the Sunday after Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday. But God's word today suggests that this would also be a good weekend to celebrate God's mercy.

-- After all, we hear about it in all three readings in one way or another. God shows mercy to his unfaithful people after Moses pleads with him. Paul speaks of his experience of God's mercy despite his past failings and ignorance. And Jesus tells us two parables of how God seeks out the lost.

-- Yes, we get the distinct impression that God's mercy is abundant and even aggressive. God doesn't just wait for us to come to him—he seeks us out. It's an appropriate message for this year of mercy.

-- In the upcoming three weeks, we will be focusing throughout our diocese on three groups of people who need to experience God's mercy through us: the divorced and remarried, those directly affected by abortion, and homosexuals and their families. More on that to follow.

-- This weekend, though, it might be best to zero in on God's desire and ability to reach out to us when we are lost in any way. That's clear in the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. God misses us when we are lost, and we should miss our lost brothers and sisters.

-- It's easy to understand our need for the hand of God when we've gone seriously astray. Someone who has a failed marriage knows that need. A person who's fallen into an addiction to drugs, alcohol or some other substance knows that need as well.

-- But God reaches out to each of us when we are a bit lost in lesser ways. Perhaps we've had an argument with a friend and have said something we regret. Or, we've made a stupid or hateful remark when we were caught up in a lively discussion.

-- We need God's hand to reach out to us in those and other "smaller" moments of being lost. God is there for us to bring us back, again and again. Often, the Sacrament of Penance helps us feel his tender hand.

-- Also, God calls us to celebrate his mercy. All too often, when someone comes back to God, we are cynical about it. That's particularly true if we did not like that person or his views.

-- I can remember the cynical remarks when Nixon's aid Charles Colson accepted Jesus Christ, and the comments about Newt Gingrich when he was brought back to the Catholic Church after two divorces. Or, on the other side of the aisle, some snide remarks about Senator Ted Kennedy's Catholic funeral celebration.

-- God reaches out to all of us when we are lost. He only asks us to take his hand, and to celebrate when others come back to him.

-- This weekend we also remember the events that took place 15 years ago today in our country. The events of 9/11 are seared into the psyches of virtually all of us 25 years old and above.

-- Much has taken place since then, and the threat of terrorism still exists in our world. Evil is still alive, and will be until the earth is transformed and the final triumph of good occurs.

-- Still, God's mercy is ever present, and we should not forget that fact. No one is outside of the reach of God's mercy. I think, for instance, of people such as Mubin Shaikh. He fell under the spell of people who perverted his Muslim faith and led him to violent groups.

-- But he was saved from that influence by, of all people, a Syrian Imam who studied the Qu'ran thoroughly with him over two years. He convinced him that true Islam is not what the terrorists had him believe. And Shaikh has worked to combat that influence ever since.

-- Yes, God's mercy can be shown in many ways in different cultures and religions. That mercy touches each of us personally. We only have to be open to experiencing it—and celebrating it as well.