

Divine Mercy Sunday

19th April 2020



The French artist Jacques-Louis David painted the above portrait of Napoleon Bonaparte between 1801-1805. It is commonly titled '*Napoleon Crossing the Alps*.' The artist expresses, with out a shadow of doubt, the enigmatic figure of Napoleon who conquered so much of Europe in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Upon his horse the emperor comes across as both commanding and formidable. However there is a wonderful story about Bonaparte that shows another side of his character not revealed in this portrait.

A mother once fell at the knees of Napoleon begging for pardon for her son. The boy in question was a soldier who had more than once deserted his regiment. The emperor replied that the young man, as well as absconding without permission from the army, had also committed a number of other offences and the justice to be delivered was death.

"But I don't ask for justice?", said the mother. "I plead for mercy."

"But your son does not deserve mercy." Napoleon replied.

"Sir," the woman cried, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask for."

"Well, then," the emperor said, "I will have mercy." And he spared the woman's son.

Mercy cannot be earned, bought, taken or ever deserved. It is a gift freely given as Napoleon demonstrated to the pleading mother. This Second Sunday of Easter we are reminded of God's mercy for all of us. In the Gospel today (Jn 20:19-31), Our Lord grants authority to the disciples to share his divine mercy with others.

'He said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you." After saying this he breathed on them and said:

"Receive the Holy Spirit.

For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven;

for those whose sins you retain, they are retained.'" (Jn 20:21-23)

The Sacrament of Confession is instituted and firmly established through Jesus' authority, bestowed on the Apostles. Jesus wants the Easter mystery not to be confined to a memory, an historical past event but something real, alive and active transcending all time. He wants to give life to all those in darkness. He wants to raise up all those in the tomb. He wants to cleanse and renew them through the forgiveness of their sins. From the Cross he has washed us with his blood and he wants this, his life giving blood, to awaken us and bring us back to real life. We are blessed to have this wonderful and tangible gift of Jesus' mercy in the Sacrament.

We in turn are asked to be people who forgive and show mercy to others. To receive mercy is wonderful but to share and give it to others, especially to those who we find difficult is a challenge! During the reign of Elizabeth I the Church in England was persecuted. St. Edmund Campion, a priest and eventually a martyr for the Faith, was betrayed and arrested. While in prison he was visited by the man who had betrayed him. Not only did St. Edmund forgive his betrayer, he also urged him to leave England where he might be in danger himself, and gave him a letter of safe-conduct to a Catholic nobleman in Germany. St. Edmund Campion showed true mercy, even to his own Judas, because he had experienced Jesus' mercy himself.



Within our own parish of St. Mary's there are many people who are becoming disciples of mercy through their own loving actions. Over the past few weeks I have been contacted by people offering their services to help others who might be experiencing some difficulties during the lockdown. As a result of this generous self-giving, a number of vulnerable people are now getting their shopping done. Others have found the present Covid-19 emergency psychologically a worrying time. Again, thanks to kind parishioners we have been able to share, following GDPR guidelines and the law, contact details so that either through phones calls, video links or email people are able to communicate with others. There are acts of mercy taking place each and every day that are not public or will ever be recorded but again each act is a burst of light in the darkness of the tomb. Each deed of loving mercy is a witness to the power of Jesus Christ, even in the most difficult and challenging of times. Alleluia!

If you would like to volunteer to help another parishioner, in any way, living in the parish boundary then please do email sean.obrien@dioceseofsalford.org.uk My sincere thanks to all those who are doing so much now.

I would like to appeal to your financial mercy. It is not a subject I like talking about but it is an important issue. Thank you to all those who are keeping their offertory envelopes at home and saving them up each week for when they return to Mass. That is the sensible and wise thing to do as we are unable to bank any monies. I am very grateful for the financial sacrifice you are making for St. Mary's especially in these difficult economic times.

Some people are now setting up direct debits/standing orders so that the parish is regularly receiving an income in a very safe and efficient way. If you would like to do this then please contact me.

Another act of mercy is being given by Mgr John Armitage, Director of the Walsingham Shrine. He is about to lead an eight-day retreat via the Walsingham website and its Youtube channel. Each day he will give two talks and there will be plenty of opportunity for prayer. For more details please see the shrines website www.walsingham.org.uk .The retreat will begin this Sunday afternoon (19th April).

May God Bless you all and keep praying.

Happy Easter

Fr. O'Brien