Homily for the Second Sunday of Luke

Luke 6:31-36 – Fr Dcn Raphael Cyrus

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, today's Gospel contains one of the shortest and most demanding sentences Christ ever spoke: "Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful." This commandment follows immediately after yet another countercultural statement about God's character: 'He is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.'

Notice the word. In Matthew's Gospel, Christ says, "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Luke gives us the same command, but he translates perfection into a word we recognise in daily life: mercy. If we ask what it means to be like God, Luke answers that it is to be merciful. This is exactly what we keep asking God in various forms of our Jesus prayer, using our prayer ropes, saying: Kyrie eleison;

The passage begins with a rule almost everyone knows: *"As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them."* Nearly every culture has some version of it. But Christ doesn't stop there. He asks: *"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same."*

Fairness is not enough. Doing good to those who do good to us is a fair exchange, a transaction, and tax collectors manage that. Christ calls us to something that breaks the transaction: *"Love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return."* Mercy is love that gives where nothing is owed and nothing can be repaid.

And the reason is not that we are so good. It is that *God is*. *"He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil."* Think about that. Every one of us, at some point, has been the ungrateful and the evil, and the Father was kind to us anyway. Mercy is not first something we do. It is something we have received. We stand in a river of mercy and are asked only not to dam it up.

We tend to think of mercy as a mood: sympathy, a warm sentiment. But the Gospel speaks of actions: doing good, lending, giving. Saint Basil the Great is blunt about it: *"The bread which you hold back belongs to the hungry; the cloak in your closet belongs to the one who is naked."* Mercy is not generosity from our surplus. It is the recognition that what we hold has been entrusted to us.

Saint John Chrysostom says something even sharper: *"Not to share our own wealth with the poor is theft from the poor, and the taking of their very life. What we hold is not ours, but theirs."* This is not meant to crush us. It is meant to free us from the illusion that mercy is optional charity for the especially saintly.

This is exactly what Saint Paul says in today's Epistle: *"Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully... God loves a cheerful giver."* Notice, *cheerful*. Not reluctant, not guilty, not performing. A merciful person has discovered that giving is not loss but sowing, and that God supplies the seed.

But mercy is not only about money. It reaches to the person who wronged us, the family member we haven't spoken to, the neighbour we find difficult, the one who "doesn't deserve" our forgiveness.

Saint Isaac the Syrian gives us a picture of what it means to become merciful. He asks, *"What is a merciful heart?"* and answers: *"It is the burning of the heart for the whole of creation, for humans, for the birds, for the animals, even for the demons."* A heart that burns for all, including those who hurt it.

That is a high standard, and none of us is there yet. But notice that Isaac does not describe a rule. He describes a heart. Mercy is a transformation, and it begins in small, concrete choices: to give when we could keep, to forgive when we could hold on, to speak gently when we could speak sharply.

The Fathers noticed the striking resemblance between ἔλεος, mercy, and ἔλαιον, oil. They are not etymologically related, but the resemblance was used theologically. Oil soothes and heals the wounded body; mercy does the same for the wounded soul. Mercy does not stand at a distance from suffering. It comes close, touches the wound, and begins to heal.

So what do we do with this Gospel? Let us choose one person to whom we can show mercy this week, perhaps someone who cannot repay us, perhaps someone we find hard to love. Let it be a gift, a call, a word of forgiveness, an hour of our time. And let us remember that we approach the Chalice today not because we have earned it, but because we have been shown mercy. *"Lord, have mercy"* is not only what we say in the liturgy; it is what we are invited to become. *"Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful."*