

I speak to you in the name of our Creator, the Son our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit our Comforter. Amen

Please be seated.

I want to begin today by making reference to three gospel readings we have heard before. Let's begin with the gospel where Jesus is weeping at the tomb. This passage happens to be the gospel reading appointed for next Sunday, but I wish to make a connection here between this passage and the theme of my sermon for today, which is this - My faith lies in God's great mercy.

You may recall the story from John's gospel about Jesus weeping at the tomb for his dear friend Lazarus. Lazarus' two sisters, Martha and Mary, were devastated by his death. Both women were left to grieve his passing. Both women also believed that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus' death, had Jesus only arrived before Lazarus died. But God had other plans, plans which were beyond their ability as human beings, to understand.

Martha and Mary were two very different people. Martha was very pragmatic, very caring, very grounded. She liked things ordered, and she enjoyed seeing to everyone's daily needs. Scripture tells us that Jesus and his disciples enjoyed staying at the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, and often did just that. Their home had become a place of refuge, a place for Jesus and his followers to rest, to recharge and to refresh

themselves. And Martha, well Martha was always there to care for their needs. For Martha, this was her calling in life.

Mary was more easily led to follow after Jesus. Mary loved to be near Jesus when he was teaching. Mary sought to understand the meaning of her relationship with her Creator through her relationship with Jesus. Scripture shares that Mary would sit at Jesus' feet and listen to his every word. Mary was not at all like her sister, Martha. Yet both loved their brother Lazarus, and they loved their friend Jesus, the teacher they believed had been sent from God.

Jesus' love for Martha and Mary is much broader than we could ever imagine. He wept at his friend Lazarus' grave. He went on to reassure the two sisters that faith would give them the strength they needed in the face of their loss. What he meant here, was God's love for Martha and Mary would see them through the loss of their brother. Similarly, God's love for us is very much the same as it was for Martha and Mary. No matter how different we are, no matter how out of touch with our world we may be, God still loves all believers and any others who seek to find the Creator, while He may still be found.

Let's move from Martha and Mary to Bartimeus. You remember him, right from today's gospel reading?

Blind Bartimeus, the beggar who knew what he wanted of Jesus. He wanted his sight back! And he had faith that Jesus could heal his infirmity. Bartimeus had faith so strong that

when Jesus called out to him, Bartimeus threw off his cloak and jumped up to meet Jesus, believing that he would be healed.

And one last example of faith can be found in the story of the woman who but touched the hem of Jesus' robe, believing that she would be healed. Here again, faith, believing in God's gift of grace working in someone, results in this woman being given new birth into the living hope of God's salvation. And of course, she receives healing of her infirmity.

So, we have three different stories, three different expressions of people's faith, faith that God would deliver them out of their affliction. Three stories of God's "great mercy" for humankind, for all humankind.

In the reading from 1 Peter 1:3-9, we hear of God's "great mercy", mercy which gives us new birth into the living hope of salvation, just as it did for Martha and Mary, Lazarus, Bartimeus, and the unnamed woman who had suffered for twelve long years before Jesus recognized her faith and made her well. We hear in 1 Peter, that our faith is precious. It is much more precious than fine gold. Gold is a metal refined in the fire, tested for its purity, and acknowledged to be genuine, but only after it is refined.

Some of you are aware that I was a dentist in my earlier life. One of the things a dentist has to learn to do is to cast a gold crown. To do this, one has to heat gold wafers until they become molten and take on the appearance of a glowing red

fish-eye. Only then, only at that stage, will the gold be refined and pure enough to cast into a crown which can be used then to restore a tooth. Our faith is like that. It is continually being refined, being tested, being purified, until it finally reaches its greatest point of purity. For many of us, that point only comes when we leave this existence for the splendor of eternal life in God's kingdom.

Today, we rejoice in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer. We rejoice even though none of us living today has ever seen Jesus. Very few of us have heard him speak directly to us, nor have we experienced first-hand his blessed presence. Yet we love him. And we trust in his promises as they are written in the scriptures, just as we heard in Mark's gospel, today. The gospel writer we know as John also wrote of words spoken by Jesus in chapter 6, verses 37-40 which happens to be the gospel reading for Remembrance Sunday which we will observe in two weeks time, "And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. [And], that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life." That's a promise only God can make. Here again, we hear of God's great mercy poured out for us.

Let's face it, we all struggle in this temporal life. Our lives are shaped by suffering, struggle, and uncertainty. Suffering which is often caused by things outside of our own control. Things such as political tensions, religious intolerance, economic

inequalities, racial differences and cultural choices. Yet we need to have faith in God's love for all peoples and all nations of this world.

Our faith is ever being refined before God. Many have gone before us and their faith was so refined until they crossed over into the eternal kingdom. And many of these are ones we remember as blessed saints before the throne of Almighty God, relatives and friends who have died and entered the Kingdom of Heaven where suffering, and sorrow, and weeping will be no more. One day we will see them all again in that abiding place prepared for all believers. That too is God's promise for us all.

God's great mercy surrounds us and gives us hope that we too are God's own. For this, we give thanks to God, our Creator, and to Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, and to the Holy Spirit, our Comforter. Amen