

Mercy and Men

November might well be a sad month because the glory of summer is gone. We have missed the point if we do not see that it is also an exultant month because the purpose of summer has been accomplished: the fruits of the harvest are in our hands.

Man's year begins, as his life begins, by his sharing of the nature of God in sanctifying grace. As soon as the eyes of his mind can see at all, they scan divine horizons; as soon as his heart can reach out, its gesture is the unconditioned sweep of love above all things, embracing all things because of what it loves supremely. Divine life, divine knowledge, and divine love should break forth in actions which are Godlike; and when better could we expect that harvest of Godlike acts than in the full maturity of the last days of the year, the last years of a life? November, the month of the Poor Souls, is also the month of the most Godlike acts of man, the month of mercy.

For no other activity is so characteristically divine as an act of Mercy. The miracles of Our Lord, as He walked through a countryside of misery healing the ills of man, were much more than divine pity, more even than the thoughtfulness of divine love; these merciful miracles were the resounding confirmations of His claim to be divine, characteristically divine acts that hit the minds and lives of men with a solid impact. For only a superior can be merciful, ministering to an inferior, and superiority is proper to God; only from fullness can another's miserable emptiness be filled, and fullness is God's. This is why the divine mercy is in or behind every divine action relative to men.

Men are never so Godlike as when they are merciful. Even the pitifully limited brand of mercy that is merely human, the mercy which so wistfully circles the fringes of another's life, stops men short in surprised gratitude and an almost reverential awe; as though the shadow of God has passed over them. Indeed, it is here that the least of men still evidences clearly the image of the divine which is so buried in his very nature. When men scatter supernatural mercy among their fellows, one like God has indeed passed among men. For in this supernatural mercy is something of the boundlessness of the mercy of God: reaching to all men in the name of a love that excludes no one; reaching to the depths and heights of the souls of men by the penetrating instruments of prayer and merit; and auxiliary of divine omnipotence working wonders beyond human hopes or dreams.

Mercilessness demands, and guarantees, a special blindness, a bitter isolation. The blindness, for example, of the proud who cannot see either the misery of others or their own need for mercy, and who are thus cut off from men and God; or the similar blindness of the complacently powerful, the selfishly happy, the bitterly despairing, the violently angry. Such as these cannot see men, let alone be close to them. For the eyes of men are never opened wide until they embrace all men for love of God, and see the miseries of men as miseries of their other selves.

By the kindness of God, we walk divine heights, acting like God in ministering to the miseries of men. Lest we mistake those heights for our own rather than His, there is no man who cannot in his turn minister to our miseries. November gives us a special opportunity to breathe the rare air of our high estate; to appreciate both the miseries of men and our own need for mercy of men and of God; to escape from the lonely, blind, isolated group of the merciless. It is an exultant month, crowded with the harvest of a man's year, of a man's life; the Godlike activity of mercy; we condemn ourselves to a loneliness too bitter to bear if they suffer from our mercilessness. (The Sign)

PRAYERS: (deceased) Martin Callahan, grandfather of Coyne Callaghan, '44 (111) mother of Marino Giuffre (Wal), operation.