

The proclamation of our Lord, as he read the scroll from the prophet Isaiah, in our Gospel this evening/morning, is essentially a proclamation of a year of Jubilee. In antiquity, the proclamation of a Jubilee Year was one that cancelled all debts and allowed all people to begin anew. Pope Francis' proclamation of a Jubilee year of mercy (this year) is just the same. This year of mercy, in the words of Nehemiah from our first reading says, "Today is holy to the LORD your God. Do not be sad, and do not weep", for all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law. He said further: "Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks, and allot portions to those who had nothing prepared; for today is holy to our LORD."

In other words, this year of Jubilee is meant to heighten our awareness of Jesus' love for us by His cancelling out all of our debts, because of our sin, through the mercy and forgiveness of His sacrifice on the cross. However, there is also a catch, as Nehemiah points out in the first reading. Perhaps we missed it. So, I'll remind us again. He says, "Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks, and allot portions to those who had nothing prepared; for today is holy to our LORD."

Indeed, the Lord's mercy and forgiveness is something to celebrate. But the catch is, according to Nehemiah, that those who can afford to celebrate with rich food and sweet drink, also need to share their bounty with those who have none. Why is this so important we may ask? At first, we might think that this command to share with those who have nothing has to do with some sort of social justice. It does, I think, but it also goes deeper than that.

The command to those “who have” to share with the “have-nots” is a reminder that we are not only equal in the eyes of the Lord, but that we are also equally impoverished before the Lord. Material wealth in Jesus’ day meant that God had blessed you because your life was pleasing to him. If you were poor, then somewhere, somehow along the line you had found your way into disfavor with him. Thus, if you follow the logic, commanding the “good” to share their blessings with the “not-so-good” meant that they were, in essence, moral equals.

Now that's a hard pill to swallow, no matter what part of history you live in. But when you consider it, we all fall short of the glory of God, whether it's by an inch or a mile. That is the point of the Jubilee year; that is the point of this Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis. God wants to gather us; not let us to continue to be scattered.

This Year of Mercy is about the fact that God doesn't care about the distance or how far we've essentially scattered ourselves. This Year of Mercy is about bringing back the near and the far. It's about making that path easy to take up. We have pamphlets on the Year of Mercy available in the Narthex to help you take advantage of this incredible grace. Please take one if you haven't already and use it to help you experience the mercy and love of God, if you too will be willing to give the gift of your hearts away to Him who's only desire is to make it whole, once again.