Easter 2 B

Divine Mercy Sunday

MDP of God

A mom was concerned about her Kindergarten son walking to school. He didn't want his mother to walk with him. She wanted to give him the feeling that he had some independence, *but yet she wanted to know that he was safe*.

So, she had an idea of how to handle it. She asked a neighbor if she would please follow him to school in the mornings, staying at a distance, so he probably wouldn't notice her.   
  
The lady said-- that since she was up early with her toddler anyway, it would be a good way for them to get some exercise as well, so she agreed.

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The next school day, the neighbor and her little girl set out following behind Timmy as he walked to school with another neighbor boy he knew. *She did this for the whole week.*

As the boys walked and chatted, kicking stones and twigs, Timmy's little friend noticed the same lady was following them as she seemed to do every day all week. Finally, he said to Timmy, "Have you noticed that lady following us to school all week? Do you know her"?

Timmy nonchalantly replied, "Yeah, *I know who she is.*"   
  
The friend said, "Well, who is she"?

"That's just Shirley Goodnest," Timmy replied. "And her daughter Marcy." ----"Shirley Goodnest? *Who the heck is she and why is she following us"?*   
  
"Well," Timmy explained. "Every night, my mom makes me say the 23rd Psalm with my prayers, *because she worries about me so much*. And in the Psalm, it says, 'Shirley Goodnest and Marcy shall follow me all the days of my life,' ***so I guess I'll just have to get used to it!"***

My dear friends—this weekend we celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday

And when we think of God’s mercy—we of course think of how God is always willing to forgive us when we’re repented of our sins and turn to Him for mercy

And we hear about that in our gospel today—when Jesus breathes on the Apostles and says, “receive the Holy Spirit, whose sins you forgive are forgiven them—whose sins you retain are retained”

With that Jesus gives us the sacrament of Reconciliation where we can receive God’s incredible mercy

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*But our other readings today speak of God’s mercy from a different angle*—an angle we often don’t think of—In our 2nd reading today from the 1st letter of St John we heard:

In this way we know that we love the children of God  
when we love God **and obey his commandments**.  
For the love of God is this,  
that we keep his commandments.  
And his commandments are not burdensome,  
for whoever is begotten by God conquers the world.

This is a whole different way of looking at God’s mercy that we don’t often reflect on

God gives us His mercy in His commandments—*and His commandments are there to guide us so that we don’t do things that are harmful to ourselves or others*—in other words –**His commandments are there so we can become people of love**

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You see without God’s laws—because of our fallen human nature we would inevitably choose to live in ways that are harmful to ourselves and others

Without God’s laws we would harm ourselves by drinking alcohol excessively—by turning to drugs

But God’s law tells us that drunkenness is a rejection of our God given gift of intellect and will—*and that it’s sinful*

And of course drunkenness doesn’t just hurt the person with hang-over and other things—but a dependence on alcohol and drugs **destroys families**—*it does such grave damage to loved ones of an alcoholic or a drug addict*—*so you can see how God’s laws are there to protect us from harming ourselves and others*

Without God’s laws we would use the bodies of other people for our own selfish enjoyment

That of course could lead to children born out of wedlock—which could lead to the destruction of innocent life before birth

Or it could mean children growing up without the love of a mom and dad--- *not only moms and dads loving them*—**but a mom and dad loving each other which gives children a safe bubble to grow up in**

God’s teaching on adultery and fornication could save the world so much heartache and pain—*God’s laws are truly an expression of His mercy*

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Without God’s laws we would inevitably harm others through gossip—harming people’s reputation—harming their relationships with others—harming the ability of people to enter into a community of life

But God’s warns us in the 3rd chapter of St James against sins of the tongue—sins that tear others down—sins that cause the destruction of community life

St James compares the tongue to a spark that can cause a forest fire—or the rudder of a ship—*that’s so small in comparison with the whole ship* –**but it’s the rudder that gives direction to the whole ship**

And St James tells us that’s what our tongue is—*it gives direction to our whole lives*—it can be like a spark that causes a forest fire destroying others—destroying families—destroying relationships

*So again, we can see how God’s laws are an expression of His mercy*—**He’s trying to save us from causing harm to ourselves and others through His commandments**

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Without God’s laws we wouldn’t be faithful to our commitments—hurting spouses and children and people who count on us

Let me make an analogy with modern science and the care of our bodies

I have to tell you—*if I always ate the things I want to eat in the quantities I’d like to eat them* –**I’d be 400 pounds**

Why? *Because I love things that are bad for me*

I can’t eat a donut after every Mass like I want too

I can’t have desert with every lunch and every dinner like I want to—I can’t have a bag of Doritos every night like I want too*---again if I did everything I feel like doing* ---I wouldn’t just be fat as I am—**I’d be obscenely obese**

In the same way –if someone wants to become a great athlete---they can’t sit around watching TV or playing video games all day eating Twinkies—*if they do that they’ll never make it in the NFL or NBA- or Major League baseball*—they’ll never be in the WNBA or a professional soccer player or volleyball player--be an Olympic gymnast, or skater or swimmer—*they won’t even make it in Roller Derby*

If you’re going to be a great athlete –you’ll need to discipline your body---if you’re going to be in shape you’ll need to be disciplined in what you do and what you eat

In the same way—*if our souls are going to be what God wants our souls to be*—if we’re going to be people of love—if we’re going to be people of virtue—**we can’t do everything we feel like doing**

St John in our 2nd reading tells us that *God’s commandments are there so we can conquer the world* – so we can conquer everything in us that is self-destructive and destructive of others

Several years ago I saw the movie, “God’s not dead”—in that movie one young lady who was really struggling with faith said, “It’s easy to know what the Church is against these days—but it’s hard to understand what the Church is for”

The Church is for human dignity

The Church is for self-sacrificing love

The Church is like a sport’s coach encouraging us to be all God made us to be –to be the best version of ourselves

*That’s what God’s laws are for*—to be a sure guide on how to become the best version of ourselves

And just as if we always followed our feelings –our bodies would be far from what we want them to be—far from what God made them to be

In the same way—if we follow our feelings our souls are not going to be what they are meant to be

So God in His incredible mercy gives us His commandments

And following His laws aren’t always easy—just like passing up another donut—or passing up on another piece of coconut cream pie---or not eating the entire 32 oz solid chocolate bunny all in one sitting—isn’t easy

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But St John tells us we have a built in detector on how much we love God---How’s that?

St John said, “That we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome”

You see obeying God’s commandments are a sign of our love for Him---*but the more we love Him the easier it will be to keep His commandments*

Why? Because when we love Him with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength---*we’ll want to please Him* –**we’ll want to make Him proud of us**

*When we really struggle to obey Him* –**our love is less than perfect**

*If we outright refuse to obey*—chances are—**our love isn’t very real**

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My friends, God in His love wants us to be the best we can be-the best version of ourselves

And that’s why He gives us His commandments—not as a burden that is impossible to live by—*but as an expression of His Mercy*—**so that we can avoid the pitfalls where we hurt ourselves and others**

On this Divine Mercy Sunday—let us thank God for His incredible mercy—both His mercy in forgiving us when we fail—and His mercy in giving us His commandments so we can learn to live lives of true love—Amen? Amen