

- As we near the holy and penitential season of Lent, our readings today once again focus our attention on sin and its consequences. And as we meditate on sin this week in the readings, we are given a sense of great hope from the Lord!
- In our first reading Isaiah the prophet receives a message of mercy from our Lord, who tells him not to worry about the sins of the past. The Lord says that not only will He forgive our sins, but He will forget them. The Lord likens His mercy to spring gushing forth in a barren desert.
- And that's the way it is with our souls when we are in sin. As we receive forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, His mercy flows like a river through the wasteland of our sinfulness, reviving our souls and bringing us back to life.
- Rescued from the eternal death that mortal sin wreaks and returned to a state of grace, our souls are then able to bear the good fruits of virtue that help us along the path to salvation.
- In our Gospel we have the familiar story of Jesus healing and forgiving the paralytic who was lowered down to Him on a stretcher, underscoring the connection between sin and suffering.
- Sin and suffering go hand-in-hand because sin always produces suffering of some kind. When we sin we often cause others to suffer. But sin also wounds our souls. Although we may not always realize it, we always suffer to some degree when we sin.
- As I mentioned last week, sin is like a disease that debilitates us. Thus, whenever we sin, we are in need of more than just forgiveness. We need healing too! Think of the words of responsorial psalm: "Lord, *heal* my soul, for I have sinned against you."
- The psalmist doesn't just ask for forgiveness. He asks for healing too! And so should we.
- And the forgiveness that we find in the sacraments is the most important form of healing we can ever experience. God's mercy is like a salve that soothes and cures us whenever we injure ourselves through sinful actions.
- But as Christians, it is not enough for us to seek out God's mercy; we also need to share it with others. Doing so is part of our baptismal duty.
- Just as a bride adopts the name of her husband when they are joined in the covenant of marriage, so too do we – the Bride of Christ – who enter into a covenantal relationship with Jesus Christ through baptism take on His name. In that most sublime moment of baptism we become *Christians!*
- But it is not enough simply to call ourselves *Christian*. We must also learn to live like Christ, to be like Christ! One of the primary ways we do this is by showing mercy to others.
- We extend mercy to others in many ways. We do it by forgiving those who have wronged us, by reaching out to others through charitable acts, by praying for others, and in many other ways.
- In particular, during the holy season of Lent, one of the ways the Church asks to extend mercy to others is through the practice of almsgiving. Almsgiving is the providing of material goods to the poor that is prompted by charity.
- As many of you know, we are in the midst of our annual Diocesan Support Appeal, which is a wonderful way to give alms. For those of you who are registered parishioners, you should have already received a letter in the mail.
- The Diocesan Support Appeal is the annual fund-raising effort of the diocese. The money raised by this appeal is used to support 30 ministries and more than 50 programs throughout the diocese, such as educational, housing, adoption, counseling and multi-cultural programs –

including Hispanic Ministry. This appeal also supports our seminarians studying for the priesthood.

- Throughout the diocese thousands of people benefit each year from the services provided through the diocesan support appeal, including many people in our own parish.
- Our parish goal is \$54,398. Any monies that we raise in excess of our goal will be refunded directly to the parish. If we don't meet our goal, we have to make up the difference from our own budget. For 2008 we received a refund of \$13,000!
- We have all received our Lord's mercy in abundance, and as Christians we are called to share that mercy with others. Let us do so generously by giving to the Diocesan Support Appeal. And let us trust that in showing mercy to others, our Lord will show His mercy to us!