

**WORLD-PRAYER-CONGRESS for Life in LOURDES 2008**

28<sup>th</sup> of Oktober – 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2008

„Maria, To You We Entrust The Cause Of Life.“

(Johannes Paul II., *Evangelium vitae* 105)

**Talk No. 4**

from 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2008 by Fr. Bill Bellrose:

**“The Church: Ambassador of Divine Mercy“**

I would like to start with a reading from the Holy Gospel according to John. (Jn 20:19-29)

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe." Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

The Gospel of the Lord

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ, This week we come to this great place of God's mercy which is being poured out through His holy mother Mary. We can celebrate the beauty of life as healed through the Church. Many times when we talk about Divine Mercy we think of either a painting or the first Sunday after Easter which has been designated by Pope John Paul II for special attention to the Divine Mercy. However, in a real sense every day can be celebrated as a Divine Mercy Day because every day we can see God's mercy poured out in so great a way as through the Church who is the ambassador of Mercy.

In thinking about God's mercy through healing we can't help but think of the one part of our culture which is in most need of God's healing and that is all who are involved with

the culture of death, especially involved with abortion. As Pope Benedict stated last November "This direct destruction of an innocent human life can never be justified, however difficult the circumstances that may lead some to consider taking such a grave step" but when God's mercy is found and the person has repented of their sins then as Pope Benedict says, "the community should be open to welcome back all who repent of having participated in the grave sin of abortion, and should guide them with pastoral charity to accept the grace of forgiveness, the need for penance, and the joy of entering once more into the new life of Christ." This Mercy which is given through the church is not limited to only Divine Mercy Sunday but every day people are turning from their sins and feeling his mercy.

Some people who may want to point to a special day for mercy may say, "But Good Friday is the Real day of Mercy Day for all of the world." Of course we do not want to "Speak of anything but Christ and Him Crucified "(1Cor 1:23) as St. Paul says. But our Merciful and Crucified Savior comes to us ALIVE only in the glorious Resurrection. For this is the reason Christ came to us in the culture of life not the culture of death. For example, we notice that the post Resurrection appearances of Jesus in the Gospels, which we celebrate in the Eucharist during the Easter season, are all declaring the *Mercy* of God. Pope John Paul said that "the form in which God's love comes to us in this world is MERCY and God's Merciful Love has the name of *Jesus Christ*" (RH 9)

In focusing our attention on what Christ is doing in the Easter narratives, we begin to notice how profoundly Mercy is manifest and can apply this mercy to us today especially towards those who have abortions. On Easter evening Jesus appears to the frightened disciples who are securely locked away in a room-and to calm their fears, he says to them, "Peace be with you." But because of their obviously wavering faith, he then and there shows them the wounds in his hands and in his side and the mere sight of his sacred wounds healed their doubting hearts. Years later St. Peter writes in his 1st Epistle these words: "By his wounds you have been healed (1 Peter 2:24) In the same way many women who have had abortions and men who took the women or made them have abortions are locking themselves away in rooms acting in denial of what they had done acting as if they need to hide in fear that people might find out what they have done. Acting in fear like the apostles afraid that others might find them and may persecute them. Christ comes to these men and women also to extend them His peace. His wounds are extend towards these men and women in the same way so that they can be healed.

Once more Jesus says "Peace be with you" to assure the disciples they had nothing to fear, but equally important to recall to their minds, the fulfillment of the promise He made to them during that memorable Last Supper discourse when He said to them: "peace I leave you, My peace I give you-not as the world gives, do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid." Note, He doesn't rebuke them for abandoning Him during His Passion-rather He gently breathes the Holy Spirit upon them with these words: "receive the Holy Spirit-whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." It is, indeed, a Mercy Apparition. In the same sense those who have had abortions but are hiding Jesus does not rebuke but come to them with Mercy.

One (1) week later, how clear it is that Our Lord's merciful love is turned full force to Thomas who had been insisting on his own criteria for faith in the risen Christ. The other Apostles had said to him: "We have seen the Lord"-but their seeing was not convincing enough for Thomas, who apparently doubted the sole evidence of his own eyes. Another sense would have to confirm his sense of sight-the sense of touch. So he exclaims, "unless I see the marks of the nails in his hands, and put my fingers into the nailmarks, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." That opportunity to do so comes to Thomas eight days after Jesus' first appearance to the disciples. Jesus is standing in their midst-Thomas is present now and Jesus does not wait to be questioned by Thomas, but to show that he was somehow present even when Thomas used certain words to his fellow disciples-He uses the same words-"Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." St. John Chyostostum, one of the early Fathers of the Church writes: "Consider the clemency of the Master-how for merely one soul He shows Himself and His wounds and draws near to save One. And yet the disciples who had spoken were worthy of belief, and so was He who had promised. Yet because Thomas alone asked for more proof, Christ does not deny him." Christ does not deny anyone His mercy many of the people that have had an abortion will deny Christ's ability to heal Him but Christ will go after that one soul just as He went after Thomas.

This scene is one of heart-breaking Mercy. It is Thomas' heart which is broken open-it is Thomas' heart which is touched to elicit from him one of the most beautiful expressions and supreme acts of Faith in the Gospels-"My Lord and My God." A rather strange response. We might have expected him to exclaim words like these-"Now, I believe-now I'm really convinced." But no-"My Lord and My God." His senses of sight and touch could never have persuaded him that Jesus was his Lord and God. As St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians proclaims: "No one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit." It was the lack of Faith then that caused Thomas to doubt. Now, we can infer from the words of St. Paul that this sudden *Act of Faith* for Thomas was a gift due entirely to God's instant and gracious giving. Well might Jesus have said to Thomas words similar to those he once said to Peter-"Flesh and Blood did not reveal my true identity to you, neither did your senses of sight and touch, but My Father through the Holy Spirit whom I give to you." It is the Holy Spirit who will move the heart of the person who has had the abortion to finally see that the Divine Mercy is present. That God's mercy can be given to them from the Church acting as that distributor of Mercy. It is through many different ways that people will be able to come around to that expression like Thomas. First it can be through finally hearing about God's mercy. I know from my own experience that at the parish I gave a homily on God's Mercy and how God can forgive any sin that is repented of, when I said this I said even sins such as Abortion, contraception, and Murder among other sins. This helped many people to come back to this sacrament. There are many ways to look at this scene and see God's Divine Mercy being poured out on people who will finally come to believe.

Pope John Paul looks on this scene of Mercy with joy: "Yes" he says, "Jesus is true God and true Man!" Like the apostle Thomas, the Church is constantly invited by Christ to

touch His wounds, to recognize, that is, the fullness of His humanity, taken from MARY, given up to death, transfigured by the Resurrection: "Put your finger here and see my hands, and put your hand, and place it in my side" (Jn 20:27). Like Thomas, the Church bows down in adoration before the risen One and never ceases to exclaim "My Lord and My God" (Novo Millennio N. 21.)

The Gospel tells us, almost as an aside that Thomas is called a twin - but we're never told the name or gender of the other twin. We can only speculate. But the fact that the Gospel writer thought this bit of information important enough to record may very well be his way of telling us to see ourselves as Thomas' twin-his doubting brothers and sisters-his twin in belief and disbelief. Even St. Gregory the Great said that he found more encouragement in Thomas' struggling faith than in Mary Magdalene's easier expression. People who have had an abortion also can feel more like the twin want to believe but not allowing that belief to be seen. Many times they feel they need more than just the words from people to know about Christ mercy. They have a hard time reaching out to touch those wounds of Christ so that their unbelief can be healed and they can start that healing process.

## II. TOUCHING THE WOUNDS OF CHRIST

Pope John Paul said that the Church constantly needs to "touch the wounds of Christ."

"How is this possible?" We can we touch the wounds of Christ through the sacraments. The Sacraments are an intimate encounter with Christ. In this encounter we are brought into His wounds in a unique and personal way. Healing for those who have had abortions can begin in these sacraments. For instance:

(1) **Baptism:** we touch the wounds of Christ in the Sacrament of Baptism, which rests in the center of the Church's paschal celebration of Easter. How blessed we are when we are able to go to the baptism of a new born child we ask God to, *increase our awareness* of these blessings which are bestowed on us in baptism and *renew in us the gift* of life within us. This sacrament can be hard for someone who has had an abortion when they see the baby and the new life this child has, but in the healing process this can also be a very powerful sacrament, because it does Increase the awareness and renews in us the gifts of God life.

### ***INCREASE OUR AWARENESS***

Every year we ask God to *Renew* your gift of life within us. The two words *increase* and *renew* emphasize the fact that Baptism is a dynamic reality. In the waters of Baptism we die to sin and death and rise forgiven to newness of life. An early text inscribed in the baptistry of St. John Laterans's Basilica in Rome, expresses this wondrous and joyful faith:

"Reborn in these depths, they (the Baptized) reach for heaven's realm. This spring is life that floods the world, the wounds of Christ its awesome source. Sinner, sink beneath this sacred surf that swallows age and gives back youth...Sinner Shudder not at your sins kind and number, for those born here today are holy."

How clear it is that Baptism is itself a spring of merciful love-a font of Mercy, and for those who were not baptized before this point and are now brought into the Church this spring of life brings them new hope and allows them to touch the wounds of Christ in a very special way.

### **(2) Reconciliation:**

The Sacrament of Reconciliation, too, is a celebration of the Mercy of God made possible by the glorious wounds of the Risen Christ. Christ's love breathes the Spirit of love and Mercy upon the penitent. Pope John Paul in the "Gospel of Life" writes to women who have had abortions: "The Father of Mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. You will come to understand that nothing is definitely lost, and you will be able to ask forgiveness of your child, who is now living with the Lord."

A woman who had an abortion writes of this reality: "If I examine only my failures to do all things in Christ's love, then I am easily discouraged by the long road of transformation that lies ahead. But, if I allow God's mercy to examine my failures, then I am easily encouraged by the realization that I am being made perfect, not by my efforts to be loving, but by God loving me."

St. Augustine said something similar. "I remember my sins," he said, "not so much as committed by me, but as healed by god."

In this powerful sacrament the women are forgiven of their sins, but many times they do not want to forgive themselves and so they come back and confess this sin over and over. This is why the healing process needs to be continued from there. It is not a failure of the sacrament or the graces given in the sacrament but of the state of fallen human nature. With this fallen human nature more needs to be done. So what is there that can help after confession.

### **(3) Eucharist:**

Let us never forget that the Eucharist itself is the foundation of Mercy for the Church, because Christ's Sacred wounds are most surely touched by the faith of those who hear the Gospel of Mercy and who celebrate and worthily receive the merciful Lord coming to us under the appearance of bread and wine-(as really as He appeared to St. Thomas) The Our Father which we pray during the Eucharistic celebration is itself a Mercy prayer, and is followed by prayers for mercy, joy, and peace-as when we cry out to the Lamb of God to have mercy on us and grant us peace. In receiving our Lord into us we make an act of love asking Jesus to consume us as we consume Him. In this act I have found it very

helpful for those who have had abortions to truly use this time which our Lord is close to them than any time to help them feel Jesus' loving presence and to turn to Jesus in a greater way at this time. In this way these women and men are going deep into the wounds to be healed.

### III. MERCY AND LIFE

We touch the wounds of Christ, surely in the Sacraments, but also in and through Deeds of Mercy we do for love of God and neighbor. If we could be more aware of how deeply we live and move in God's mercy, we would be more radiant with the peace of Christ.

In the encyclical "Rich in Mercy" Pope John Paul II writes, "Mary is the one who has the deepest knowledge of the mystery of God's Mercy. She knows its price. She knows how great it is. She experienced Mercy as no one else did because she was preserved from original sin and enriched with the fullness of grace. She was chosen, through no merit of her own, to be the mother of the Redeemer-the King and Father of Mercy-a fact that certainly entitles her to be called Mother and Queen of Mercy. She began to fulfill her role as Mother of Mercy in a visible and public way as early as the Wedding Feast of Cana when the newlyweds ran short of wine. In response to her intercession, Jesus performed His first miracle. In heaven, she continues to intercede for us her children here on earth; hence, we confidently invoke her aid with the prayer: "Hail Holy Queen Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope and end it beseeching her "to turn your eyes of Mercy towards us." And you know what-"Never was it known that anyone who sought her intercession was left unaided. In this place where Mary came to a humble peasant girl to show the world God's Mercy, we see the healing effect of God mercy on so many. When people come to Lourdes they don't always get physical healing although there are many who do. But many times the greatest healing is that of the emotional and spiritual. There are great stories of people who have come here to be healed and left with the same physical problems but are healed and brought closer to Christ. Women who have had abortions can look to our Mother of Mercy and see how she wants to be a loving mother towards them and wants to help them find that Mercy.

We can also bring the message of Lourdes out to the world in a unique way. It is with the help of St. Bernadette that we can do this. St. Bernadette even though she was not healed of her physical problems was able to bring so many to healing by co-operating with our Lady and our Lord. This young girl can also be a source of healing for many young girls in our society who have not turn towards God and our Lady but turned towards death. We can now use this spot to show those young women that there is hope for all because if God can heal the body of those infirmed God can also heal the soul. We can provide testimonies from women who have been healed of their scars by trips to Lourdes. One women who I know but wants to remain unknown talks about how after her abortion she fell into many addictions which is common, and then kind of pulled out, and was able to get married. She said that when she had her two children she always felt that guilt and would constantly see thing attacking them and she would have days where she would just

sit on the floor and cry because of the pain that was in her. She did not realize all of this was happening to her because of her abortion. She tried to push the abortion as far away and deep inside of her as she could. She was traveling with a few friends to France thinking well maybe this will get her mind off of everything and she just needed to relax. One of her friends wanted to go to Lourdes so she agreed. She said that when she came to Lourdes she just kept hearing this voice saying go to confession she had not been to confession since grade school and was not looking forward to anything like that so the first day she just ignored it finally she was standing on the second day next to a priest and she said, all I kept thinking was go to confession to this priest. So she said if he speaks English I will go. He did speak English she was horrified, he took her aside and was hearing her confession when all of a sudden he said and when did you have your abortion. She didn't think she mentioned that but could not remember she told him and as she was talking about it she said, "I just broke down and cried." She said everything came out. The confession went on for almost an hour and at the end I felt like a massive weight was lifted. I didn't know what to do. She said she stood in front of our Lady and asked her to take her child and to show her how to be a loving mother. What a beautiful thing this turned out to be. She could tell when she left Lourdes that our Lady had worked a miracle in her. She came back and talked to me about this and was talking about how her whole life has changed. It stories like this that we can show the power of God's Divine Mercy working through the Sacraments and with Mary our beloved Mother.

We should not however when dealing with abortion and the healing forget about the men. In my short career as a priest I have dealt with many men who are repentant of their actions and who have gone through tremendous emotional problems. There are many ways in which men are involved with abortions and have been affected. It does not matter if they forced the girl into the abortion or went along only to support the women the evil that clings with abortion is so grave that it clings to them. Even the men that have left and have heard of the girl having an abortion will go through this even if they don't want to admit it. One individual told me he was hooked on pornography by the time he was 15 by the time he was 18 he got a 15 year old pregnant. He took her to have an abortion and said he was her brother. She had the abortion and her parents never knew about it. From that point on life seem to spiral downward. He said he spent years hiding his shame and guilt desperately keeping his sins hidden. He said He would beg God time and time again to heal him privately so that he did not have to deal with this publicly, he could not take the shame that went along with this. This young man did not realize that the power of sexual sin is in its secrecy it is in the hidden parts. After he finally went to confession he came to me and said how he needed help to get back on his feet and the other priest sent him to me. There were many complications to deal with especially with what he was going through but seeing the pain that he had in his life due to the double affects of the abortion and pornography I saw how he truly struggled, I was also able to see how God's Divine Mercy as given out through the sacraments of the Church and through a long time of healing, he could finally win out and get back to a normal life. He will always have to battle against many temptations that are left from these two evils but it is nothing like what he was dealing with before.

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It would be good now to take a quick look to the words of Pope Benedict as he spoke last year in saying “It was in Europe that the notion of human rights was first formulated. The fundamental human right, the presupposition of every other right, is the right to life itself. This is true of life from the moment of conception until its natural end. Abortion, consequently, cannot be a human right – it is the very opposite. In stating this, I am not expressing a specifically ecclesial concern. Rather, I wish to act as an advocate for a profoundly human need, speaking out on behalf of those unborn children who have no voice. In doing so, I do not close my eyes to the difficulties and the conflicts which many women are experiencing, and I realize that the credibility of what we say also depends on what the Church herself is doing to help women in trouble. In this context, then, I appeal to political leaders not to allow children to be considered as a form of illness, nor to abolish in practice your legal system’s acknowledgment that abortion is wrong. I say this out of a concern for humanity.” As the Church stands as a voice crying out against this sin of abortion, we need to see how this admonishment against those having abortions is in itself is an act of Mercy and how God’s Mercy is given us through these words. For we become a voice for those who cannot speak for themselves. The Churches concern is that every human who is made in the image and likeness of God is precious and needs to be protected. The Churches mercy reaches all the way into the womb at the time of Fertilization and will protect that life until they take their last breath and pass onto the other side.

As faithful Catholic we follow in the Church in its distribution of mercy which we seen poured out at that great Eucharistic celebration of the Mass. In the Mass, the priest will elevate for your adoration the Sacred Body and the Precious Blood. As devout and believing Catholic you might exclaim within your hearts the same act of Faith first uttered by Thomas the Apostle-"My Lord and My God." But as praiseworthy as that act of Faith may be-as followers of Christ, it is not enough, for as Jesus himself once said (Matt 7:21)-"not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My father in heaven." And God wills that we be merciful as He is Merciful.

May I give you the short formula to exercise Mercy toward your neighbor as taught to St. Faustina by our Lord: I am sure this is done by all of you here it is just a reminder on what we need to do.

The first is by **DEED**. Looking at our Lady and seeing how she used this spot as a place of healing is a good way to see the deeds. Do we strive to make our areas places of healing and mercy? Will people look at our actions and know that we are pro-life and not talking about it but living the message. Do we frequent the sacraments so that we can feel that mercy in our lives and then bring that mercy out to the rest of the people? Do we offer sacrifices for the conversion of the culture of death?

The second is by **WORD**. When we speak to people that have had abortions or work in the industry do we admonish the sinner and instruct the ignorant out of charity. Sometimes when we do these spiritual works of mercy we act out of pride and then the other side gets in. For if our words are from Christ then we will hopefully convert mind

and souls. Are we willing to talk to the people about what they did and to take the time to explain it to them.

The third is by **PRAYER**. It can be easy to pray for the aborted babies, to pray for women who are thinking about having abortions and sometimes we will even pray for the politicians so they will not support this grave evil but do we pray for the conversion of those performing the abortion, do we pray for the healing of the women who had abortions, do we pray for the fathers of these children. Asking God's mercy on these people and for their conversion. Do we also pray for the change of the heart and mind of the culture to go back to the culture of life from the culture of death. You can pray for so many things in this movement but we need to spend the time on our knees.

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The first is by **DEED**.

The second is by **WORD**.

The third is by **PRAYER**.

Do them, my friends, and you're sure to be numbered among the merciful, blessed by God for time and eternity.