

## *Ordinary Time 4C 2016*

### *Taking the Gift for Granted*

How quickly things can change! At the beginning of the gospel everybody speak highly of Jesus. But by the end of the gospel, they are so angry with him that they are ready to throw him out of their town, his own hometown. What happened? Why *did* the people change their minds so quickly about Jesus? Why *do* people change their minds so quickly about Jesus even today?

Jesus comes with a gracious offer of God's mercy and salvation. He proclaims he is about to fulfill all the promises of God. He is the one they have been waiting and hoping for. He is the embodiment of God's mercy; he is mercy itself. But as soon as he announces the good news of God's mercy, people begin to complain, "Isn't this the son of Joseph?" We know who this man is. We know his family. Is God going to bring about mercy and salvation in *this* man we have known all our life? Scandalized that Jesus claims so much for himself, they challenge him to do the mighty deeds in their village that he has done in other villages.

Aware of their discontent, Jesus reminds the people what happened in the time of the prophets Elijah and Elisha. When the people of their day refused to believe the message of God's mercy and salvation, God's gift was given to others. It is at this point that the people understand what Jesus means: If they do not accept the gracious gift of God's mercy that Jesus is offering to them, the gift of divine mercy will be given to others.

What happened at Nazareth is repeated again and again. God is always offering us the gift of mercy and salvation in Jesus Christ. Every time we hear the scriptures at mass, God offers us the gift of mercy. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, God offers us the gift of forgiveness. But if we do not accept the gift when it is offered, it will be given to someone who will. If we do not accept the gift when it is offered, it may not be offered in our lifetime again.

We are living at a time when God is offering us an extraordinary gift of mercy and forgiveness in the Holy Year that Pope Francis has proclaimed for us. In his letter entitled *The Face of Mercy* the Pope writes this:

Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. ... Without a witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if sequestered in a barren desert. The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope.

This Jubilee Year and this coming Lent provide us with an opportunity to experience and extend the gift of God mercy to others. In the sacrament of reconciliation and in the liturgy, we continually experience God's mercy. And having experienced that mercy, we are called to extend it to others through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

What a precious gift we have in Jesus Christ, who is the face of God's mercy. What a precious gift we have in Pope Francis and this Year of Mercy. How tragic it would be if, like the people of Nazareth, we took this offer of mercy for granted.