

Homily based on the readings from November 3, 2025 (Romans 11.29-36; Luke 14.12-14)

There is a subtle phrase in today's Gospel reading, which is easy to overlook but which is exceptionally important: "On a sabbath." If you recall the reading from this past Friday, we saw Jesus chastising the Pharisees because they objected to him performing a healing on the sabbath. Today we see a continuation of the same theme: Christ is teaching the Pharisees – and the rest of us as well – about the necessity of showing *mercy*.

The point of last Friday's reading was that healing is not a *violation* of the sabbath law, but actually its *fulfillment*. Pay attention to the text of the Third Commandment, as it is recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy:

Observe the sabbath day – keep it holy, as the Lord, your God, commanded you. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God. You shall

not do any work, either you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or donkey or any work animal, or the resident alien within your gates, *so that your male and female slave may rest as you do.*

The sabbath is explicitly designed for us to show mercy to the people – and even the animals – under our care. That is exactly *why* Jesus chose to perform the healings when he did – not *despite* the sabbath, but *because of it.*

It is not an accident that God gave the Children of Israel the Ten Commandments at the very moment he was showing them his greatest mercy – as he was delivering them from bondage in Egypt. The commandments themselves are a roadmap for mercy – the mercy God shows us and the mercy we are required to show others. The Children of Israel knew painfully well what it was like *not* to receive mercy at the hands of the Egyptians. One of the main reasons for the sabbath

commandment was for the Israelites to grant others the mercy they themselves had been denied.

In today's reading, Christ elaborates further on this point:

[W]hen you hold a banquet,
invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind;
blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you.

While there is nothing wrong with showing hospitality to our friends and family, we only demonstrate *mercy* when we care for the members of our community who can never hope to pay us back. As Christians, we must never place any conditions on our generosity – either what we have received in the past or what we expect to obtain in the future.

This lesson has major implications for our lives – and not just for what we do on Sundays. Any time we suffer any kind of cruelty, we should take that as a lesson never to inflict the same sort of injury on someone else. If somebody treats us unjustly, we must remember what the

experience feels like – not to bear a grudge against the person who harmed us, but so that we *never* do anything like that to *anyone* else.

The saint whose memorial we celebrate today, Saint Martin de Porres, is a perfect example of this principle. He was born in Peru in 1579, the son of a Spanish nobleman and a former slave. Throughout his life, he was the victim of horrific racism – even from his own father. Nevertheless, he did not respond to this cruelty with more cruelty, but with love and self-sacrifice. As a Dominican friar, he dedicated his life to caring for the sick and the poor, particularly those who – like himself – were hated on account of their ancestry or the color of their skin. On at least one occasion, his prior – his superior in the Dominican order – demanded that he stop caring for the sick. Saint Martin responded humbly but firmly: “Forgive my error, and please instruct me, for I did not know that the precept of obedience took precedence over that of charity.” Whether intentionally or not, Saint Martin was clearly echoing Christ’s own response to the Pharisees.

Unfortunately, mercy and forgiveness have largely fallen out of favor in today's world, which prefers to be governed by a hierarchy of grievances. Although we cannot control the actions of others, we *can* control our own. As Christians, we are obliged to follow Christ's example – as so many holy men and women have done before us. Regardless of the standards of society, we must remember that mercy is *always* the law of God – at any place, at any time, and *most certainly* on any day of the week.