

Homily – Installation of Fr. Larry Christian

September 11, 2016

“The name of God is mercy,” Pope Francis said at the opening of this Jubilee Year of Mercy. We may have thought of God primarily as a stern judge watching our every thought and action. It is true that we will be judged in the end by how we lived our life. God is a just judge. But he is also full of mercy, compassion, and enduring love for each of us. Jesus came among us like us in all things but sin. He truly understands our human weakness and limitations.

The first reading shows us God’s mercy. He had led his people out of slavery in Egypt in the Exodus and guided them through years of wandering in the wilderness before they entered the Promised Land. God provided protection, guidance, and nourishment for their journey – all they needed. He made a covenant with them at Mt. Sinai and gave them his law or *torah*. But, as we heard, they rebelled against God despite his care for them. God tells Moses to see what **Moses’** people have done. But Moses reminds God that they are God’s chosen people, “**your** people.” Rather than destroy them, God forgives them and gives them the opportunity to begin again, to learn their right relationship with him as beloved sons and daughters.

The so-called parable of the prodigal son is better called the parable of the loving Father. Neither son knows what it really means to be a son. The first one asks for his inheritance right away and squanders it. He returns home and is willing to work as a slave or servant. The father knows what it means to be a father and welcomes his lost **son**, not a slave, back. The elder son thinks that being a son simply means obedience and working hard but rejects his brother (“**your** son”). The father reassures the elder son of his love for him too. He also challenges him to recognize the other son as his brother. We too face that challenge daily. We may find it easier to identify with the prodigal son when we sin, but we are also like the older brother in our self-righteousness. Obedience to God’s law and hard work on behalf of the kingdom is necessary but the greatest virtue is love of God and neighbor.

St. Paul tells Timothy – and us – that “Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” I am confident that you will find in Father Larry Christian a merciful and compassionate pastor who will help you to understand God’s enduring love, his willingness to forgive us our sins. He will faithfully accompany you with the Lord Jesus in your journey through life as individuals and as a community of faith.