

Young Adults Mission of Mercy Event 2016

Contemplating God's mercy in our lives by Cardinal Tagle

Good Afternoon.

....

I was asking myself, where was I when I was a young adult. Where was I when I was 18 years old up to 35. And I am looking at you now and asking myself, did I look like them?

At 18, I was already in the seminary. Yes, I entered at the age of 15. That was regular at that time. Life was simpler, and at the age of 13, 14 people at that time, they already knew what they wanted. That's the good thing about a simple life. Even the direction of life was easier to determine. Probably the options were not that many. Having options is a grace, but having too many options and not knowing how to choose could also be a danger. Like the young ladies here, when you have 3 or 4 who are courting you. And you say maybe he is the one... , maybe letter B,... C or letter D and already 85 years you have not figured out who among the 4... ?

At 18, I was in the seminary and by the age of 24, I was already a priest. That was regular at that time. So we started young. And then at age 25, by default, I was appointed rector of the major seminary because the rector had a heart-attack and so I was brought in. And then at the age of 27 or 28, I was sent to Washington DC to study. At the age of 35, I was back home after completing my doctoral studies and I was assigned again to the seminary. That was my young adulthood. A life that was really given to the service of the church, specially through studies.

You know, the sessions today are neatly divided into 2 topics.

The first is Contemplation. Contemplating God's mercy and then the later, the second session this afternoon will lead us to action.

And that is a good combination. Contemplating and action. Not that they are mutually exclusive. True contemplation can happen while you are acting and while you are acting, you should be contemplating. But for our purposes, for intellectual, notional clarity, we want to dwell on those two topics, bearing in mind that they are not mutually exclusive and they do not negate each other. Please do not get out of this session this afternoon saying let me choose. Will I be for contemplation or for action? No. No. Now we are for both. True contemplation leads to action and true action happens while you are contemplating.

But what intrigued me more, at least for this session on contemplating God's mercy was the 2 sub-questions. Where are we most in need of God's mercy? It is an invitation for each one of us and maybe as a group to ask, yes, we definitely need God's mercy, but in what aspect of my life do I need God's mercy the most? But then I ask, is there any aspect of life you need God's mercy less? Or are they all the same? In every aspect of life, do we need God's mercy. Not more or less but the whole of God's mercy.

Then how have we encountered God's mercy in our lives? How, how have we encountered it? But let me situate this in the context of the fundamental search of young adults. Every stage of life has its fundamental, what we can call even creative tension. And so for people who are looking for a tension-free life, a stress-free life, well please wake up. You will not find that. And do not think that with retirement you will be stress-free or tension-free. Right? Are there any retired people here? No.

Life is beautiful and made more beautiful by those tensions. And it is a matter of learning how to creatively handle those tensions, then you grow. You grow up, you mature. If you look at the stage of life called young adulthood, I don't know nowadays but during our times, but I suppose that there is still some affinity to your condition. They say that the basic tension in the life of a young adult is the tension between independence, identity, I want to assert who I am, yet that is in creative tension with intimacy. I also want to belong. I want to

be accepted by others. And when you look at them, they seem to collide. Independence, then you be by yourself. But then you also long for intimacy, then you should be with others. So what do you really want?

And some people make those two fight. One more hand, they assert their independence, their identity by denying any need for intimacy. So you have people who are so driven by themselves that they think that having or wasting time with a friend or allowing other people to influence them is dangerous. Some think that intimacy, having relationship with others, allowing others into my life will ruin my independence and my identity. I search for my identity alone. Alone. That is how I discover myself.

Other people move to the other extreme. They are for intimacy all the time. So they cannot walk or go somewhere alone. When they get home, they at once text their friend. They should always be connected and they fear not being connected. And so, they wear what their friends will wear. Even their hairstyle. What do you want it now? Well, what do you think I think ... ok.

Some go that way. So this tension. Well, the good news is, you can combine them. You can find who you are in intimate relationship and if the relationships are truly, true relationships, then they will lead you to discover who you are. It's not one over or against the other. They must come together and the healthy person knows how or knows who he or she is, not because he or she has separated from the community but he or she grows as a person precisely because I am involved in the lives of others.

You know, I do a bit of marriage counselling too. And I am not anymore surprised. No. When the couples are young adults, on their wedding day, oh wow, they look at each other and say, you are the only woman in my life. I don't care if the rest of humanity dies, if you survive I am ok. Then after a few months, they say I find you suffocating. One moment they profess 'I need intimacy' then later on they say 'can you go by yourself. Give me room.' Ok. And then they say why are you leaving me alone? But you thought you need space. What do you really need? Well it is not one or the other. Can you not handle those tensions creatively such that you can be together and find yourself. That is a mature person.

You might be thinking, how is this connected to mercy? How? It is. It is. It is. It is.

Because the basic tension between independence and intimacy actually is a question of will I allow myself to belong to others? Will I discover who I am and the meaning of my life, alone, separately from others or will I discover it also in relationship with others.

I don't know here in Singapore, but in the Philippines, sometimes, they make a very bad joke. When they hear of someone getting married, then they say 'Ah, You are getting married. That is the end of your independence. It is the end of your freedom.' Again, it reveals the fight between independence and intimacy. And I say no that should not be the way. If you are getting married, you should say, No, I do not lose my freedom. I will be totally free for the one who loves me. Just call and I will be there. I'm totally free, totally free in intimacy. I guess some people are postponing marriage because of that distorted notion of 'Ah, I want my freedom'. But what type of freedom can you discover, true freedom and true identity by not belonging to anyone, by not being connected with others?

When we look at the bible, when we look at the Old Testament and the New Testament, very often the wounds of individuals, and the wounds of families and the whole of Israel originates from that. The wounds originates from the declaration 'Leave us alone. We don't need you God'. That was the main temptation to Adam and Eve. The serpent said 'Hey you know why God had forbidden you from eating of the fruit of this tree? Because if you eat it, you will be like God'. And that became an invitation. Imagine, you can be God. You can be who you are. You do not need to listen to God. Do it your way. Do it according to your desires. Listening to God, Obedience to God. Oh, that destroys your independence, your freedom! Cut that and that is the beginning of sin. A declaration of independence apart from belonging to God.

When I was much younger, there was a (and I told this in the World Youth Day) this song that became very famous, but on hindsight, we say why did we like it? It says my way. My way!

How does it go? And now the end is near, and so I face the final curtain. My friends, I'll state it clear, I'll state my case of which I am certain. I've lived a life that's full. I've travelled each and every byway. But more, much more than this, I did it my way. And then it says, regrets, oh I had a few. But then again, too few to mention. I did what I had to do and saw it through without exemption. My! Who is this? Superman, superlady?...(joke and recall)... I've planned each chartered course, each careful step along the byway. A good planner. But more, much more than this, I did it my way. Yes, there were times, I'm sure you knew, when I bit off more than I could chew, but through it all, when there was doubt, I ate it up and spit it out. I faced it all, and I stood tall and did it my way. ...

But isn't that the way that many people are going? My way. My way. And we get separated not only from neighbours, but separated from God. And that is the temptation. It looks beautiful because it is packaged, even in school, by very beautiful names – 'self-made person, self help'. So many books now on self-help, like how to construct your own table, how to repair your faucet, how to colour your hair, how to cut your hair. How to remedy this, remedy that, you know. You don't need other people anymore. Some packaged it as creativity. Some packaged it as initiative. But then, be careful, are you singing my way? And then you wake up one morning and say, I really do not need anyone. I do not need you. I do not need God.

From one perspective, that's the wound what we call sin. It is a cutting of relationship. And that type of declaring of independence and freedom to find myself ends in despair. Cut off from God and others, we do not discover who we are. The more lost we are.

In the Old Testament, the prophets already warned Israel, apart from God, you will not know who you are. In the New Testament, the parables of mercy of Jesus, (I already said yesterday). The three parables. Luke 15. The first is the parable of the lost sheep, the second is the parable of the lost coin and the third, the lost sons. Not just one son but two sons.

The first parable. The shepherd had a hundred sheep. Ninety-nine were ok but one was missing. The shepherd left the ninety-nine in search of the one that was lost. The woman in the second parable had ten coins. Nine were with her, one was missing. She swept the whole house in search of that one coin.

Then the father with two sons. The first son, the elder son was a good one. The second son, the younger one, asked for his inheritance. The father graciously gave it to him. He immediately left the house, declared his independence, and alone, squandered his inheritance on profligate living, unmindful of the hard work the father had done to give him his inheritance. A total cut. Then he realised he is no longer fit to be a son. Then he comes back. I am no longer fit to be your son. I don't belong to you anymore. I wanted to find myself but no, I became unworthy, of being called a son. His identity he realised was not apart from the father, his identity is always connected with the father. For without his father, he is not a son. But then the elder son, when he heard that the younger son had returned and there was a feast, he refused to enter the house. He refused to be a son also. And the father went out again. This father goes out of the house twice. To welcome the younger son and to invite the elder son, please come home. Come home. If you do not come home, who am I? I will not have any son and he loses his identity too.

If you look at the three parables, and according to some experts, the lost sheep. Why would the sheep get lost? They said, maybe the sheep is sick, might be close to dead, or the sheep is wounded or it is plainly dumb. The rest of the flock already moving in one direction but... it does not know how to follow direction and so it gets lost. But if you are a businessman, if you are a shepherd businessman, that lost sheep whether sick, or wounded or dumb, is a liability. You can forget it. You have ninety-nine healthy, profitable sheep. Why waste your time looking for that one. Or that coin. It is just a coin. Why don't you give that woman a dollar, twenty dollars and say stop sweeping the house for that coin.

Or the father, that father. Your younger son who squandered everything and comes home. If I were the father, I would say, what are you doing in my house? How many parents, when their son or daughter comes home and says, Mum, Dad the schoolhead told me that I have to repeat grade eleven. I had flunked the whole year and they say, Good, let's call the neighbours, let's have a party, let's have a party because you are home. ...

But according to the bible scholars, the motivation of the shepherd, of the woman looking for the coin and of the father is simply this. The lost sheep, the lost coin, and these two sons who refused to come home, they are my own, they belong to me. And if the sheep cannot come home, I will carry it home. I cannot leave it alone. Independent. The more lost it will be. This is where it belongs, home with me. And if you are sick and wounded or dumb, I will search for you. I will carry you on my shoulder. If you cannot walk, I will walk for you. The son said I am no longer fit to be called your son. Treat me as a hired worker. The father refuses. The father gives back to the son all the signs of sonship as though claiming you feel like a hired worker but for me, you are my son. Please don't say that. Don't say that you are just a hired worker. You are my son. Come home. We belong together.

This is the mercy of God. It is not an idea. It is not a concept. It is an action of God, coming from the heart. The heart of a parent, the heart of a father, the heart of a mother. And a parent understands and knows what's happening to the child even before the child could verbalise it. Even when the child declares independence. Even from afar, a parent knows. The connection of parent to child is forever. Even when the child declares independence. The parent will always feel for the child. And don't ask whether the child deserves it or not, the parent will only say whether he or she is successful or failure, that's my child. That's my child.

The mercy of God comes from that unfathomable love given to those who do not deserve it. Our human estimation is that if you are lost, then you are lost. If you are wounded, then you are wounded. If you are missing, then you are missing. But God will always say, it may be lost, it may be wounded, it may be confused but it is mine. So the mercy of God is in the context of belonging, intimacy. And it is in that intimacy that God gives us again our identity. Let us not be afraid of that intimacy with God, intimacy with neighbour. Falling in love, belonging to someone. For as long as that belonging to someone enables us to discover who we are, rather than smothering our identity.

Now I had an experience of, I just returned from the States to the Philippines after studies and one of my former students, a young priest, he was killed, he was murdered. Early morning, they found his body in the field, rice field with 32 stabs.... And it was not theft because his money, his wallet was there, his cell phone was there and so the person, a farmer going early morning to the farm, saw the body and found the wallet with telephone numbers, so he tried. And all the telephone numbers were telephone numbers of priests. So we discovered. I had to rush to the funeral, the morgue, all the investigators were there and up to now the case has not been solved.

And how, how do you tell, how do you tell the mother of this priest the bad news that her son had been killed. And so we were talking and the bishop called me. He said, You were his former rector and you know the family. You tell them. I said, Bishop, we are priests. We were ordained to proclaim the good news. And I was tempted to tell him, why don't you do it? You are the bishop! I'm me. But then, you know, I said... So they discovered the body Saturday early morning and so I called up the family Saturday afternoon. I told the eldest sister, could you bring your mother to the parish of your brother, tomorrow morning, Sunday which she usually did. So by that time, the body of the priest was already being waked in the main church. I was waiting in the rectory. So they brought the mother through the back door.

And the mother say, me, said, Oh father Chito, what brought you to this church? And I said, 'Well, I am a priest. I can go to any church'. And she said 'Where is my son?' I said, 'Oh, he is in the church'. I did not tell a lie. And she said, 'Oh, we have a lot of catching up to do and talk with you.' And so we told stories. And by the way, that woman was just released a week ago from the hospital. She had a heart attack, you know. And so I tried to talk about everything. The butterflies, and waiting for the right moment and while doing that I was saying Lord, have mercy, come Holy Spirit, tell me when. Tell me, tell me. And she kept on asking me, 'Where is my son? Why has he not coming out to greet me?' And I said, 'oh, well we will come to that'

At a certain point, an hour later, she said, 'Where is my son. There is something wrong. Where is he?' I said, 'Ok Mummy, I will tell you the story if you promise to be calm'. And we had the doctor and the nurse. We called in. And she started raising her voice, and so I called the doctor, and her blood pressure was going up. And I said, 'Ok, if you don't calm down, we won't be able to talk.' And then she said. Don't hide it from me. Friday evening,

I could not sleep, she said, and my breast was painful. A lot of pain and she said, 'whenever I feel pain in my breast, one of my children is in trouble. I know something happened. Now tell me.'

That connectedness with the child. Even physical. I told her, Friday evening your son went to a friend whose marriage is not going well. He was not able to come home. I was not able to finish the story, she concluded it. They killed my son. They killed him. I want to see him. So we brought her to the church. And she broke into a prayer. Lord, when my son asked for permission to enter the seminary, I was no. I did not want to lose him. He was mine. But you prevailed. You prevailed over me. Why did you not protect him? And then she said, 'it seems that You want him to be totally yours. I give him totally to you. He is yours now'. I could not believe what I was hearing. But witnessing this, I said, can a mother forget her child. Even should a mother forget her child, I will never forget you. That is the promise of God.

Why am I telling you this? Sometimes we make mercy, you know, a notion and our need for mercy, something that could even be abstract. And setting it in the context of the need of young adults, independence and intimacy. Don't be afraid of God's mercy. God's mercy is God's way of saying 'You are mine. You are mine. You are my child'. And it is by belonging to God, that we discover who we truly are. That is where we discover our identity, that is where we discover true freedom. We need mercy for the times that we have declared independence. A false type of independence where I become my own world and I just belong to myself. And that is the surest way to get lost. Not being connected to anyone, especially to God.

You are talented, you are driven and that is good. But make sure you don't lose yourself. That you belong to someone. And do not be ashamed to tell the world, you belong to God. You belong to God. And if because of pride, carelessness, you have been wounded, you have lost your way and cannot come home, you tell people, 'relax, relax'. Because the moment we get lost, what do we do? We try to.. turn that way.. Come on, you are lost. And what makes you sure that by turning this way, you will find your way. You are lost. Admit it. What do you do when you are lost? Wait to be found. Wait to be found. I know waiting is not a virtue anymore. Everyone is rushing but if you are lost, you will get more lost. Relax, wait, someone will find you. Maybe after a year, after two years, oh but who cares. You come home. You come home. And I hope, I hope you will experience that. And you could look into that, those moments where because of pride, you have declared independence, but then you had a gracious God, a gracious Father, claiming you even when your friends had already abandon you, you still have a God saying you are mine. That is mercy.

Ok. Is that, I mean does that make sense? I know how difficult it is, for our world right now. That is.. oh no. It even becomes some sort of a degradation of our worth if I have to depend on someone. But be careful, be careful. It is not bad at all to depend on someone, especially if you depend on God. You will find yourself.

...

So let me just close with that and later on, I will ask you to be sensitive, who are the people who feel they do not belong to anyone. Disowned. No one owns them. And we can disown others, even without declaring, even just with a sharp look, even type of silence, type of cold treatment. We can communicate to others, hey you do not belong to me. How many people are like that? Not belonging to anyone. So showing mercy is just declaring you are not alone. You are not alone, but we will get to that.

First you contemplate in your experience, how God has really embraced you. He said, 'You are mine'.