

Excerpts from Metropolitan Nathanael's Encyclical on Mercy 2019

[<https://www.chicago.goarch.org/news/metropolitan-nathanaels-encyclical-on-mercy-2019>]

What exactly is mercy? In common conversation we use the word interchangeably with “pity,” “compassion,” and “sympathy.” For us as Christians, mercy has elements in common with all of these, but it is distinctive in certain ways as well. Mercy is more than a passive feeling evoked by people in unhappy circumstances; mercy implies action. As a counterpart to justice, mercy likewise entails that a person refrain from certain deeds (e.g., taking revenge, demanding restitution) and perform others (e.g., providing for needs, addressing problems). We typically speak of “having mercy,” but perhaps it would be more appropriate to say, “doing mercy.” Mercy, like justice, can operate whether or not affection is present: one can—and should—show mercy even to the unlikeable and unfriendly

...The Holy Bible thus presents mercy under two main conceptions. In the first, mercy is a feeling evoked by the neediness of another; in the second, mercy is an unconditional resolve to keep one's promises, regardless of the outcome or recompense or even the worthiness of the other party. In the prayers of the Divine Liturgy, we rightly appeal to “the mercies” of God in the plural. For our Lord graciously bestows on us both the kindness of His deepest affection and the unchangeability of His covenant commitment to save us, unworthy though we be, from the tyranny of the Devil. ...

...One distinctive manifestation of God's mercy is connected to the act of creation itself. ...Another manifestation of the mercy of God lies in the way God cares and provides for us and for all of creation, trapped as we are by sin and death. In His mercy, God suffers with us, His children, and does not lose faith in us, despite our rebellion....The parable of the Prodigal Son teaches mercy as both compassion to those suffering (rahimim) and zealous faithfulness to the covenant between God and humanity (hesed). However, it also points us to a third manner in which the mercy of God is manifested: God's willingness to relate to us in a way that goes beyond justice and that rejects vindictiveness. Over and over, the people of God have failed to keep our side of the covenant. ... yet, over and over God has invited us back, showing us mercy as a mode of relationship that surpasses justice.

Our Response to God's Mercy: Thanksgiving and Mercy toward Others.

God's mercy can bring us from brokenness to wholeness, from sickness to health, from spiritual death to resurrected life. This is the Gospel's proclamation, and the evidence of its veracity lies in the lives of holy women and men across the ages. Essential to this transformative dynamic is our own offer of mercy toward others. Christ's words are clear, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy” (Matt 5:7)... In the lives of the saints, we see example after example of *mercy as a way of life*... The saints' lives of mercy may seem exceptional and even unnatural to us. In truth, however, we are *all* created to be merciful. To act mercifully and, ultimately, to pursue mercy as a way of life is to be authentically human.