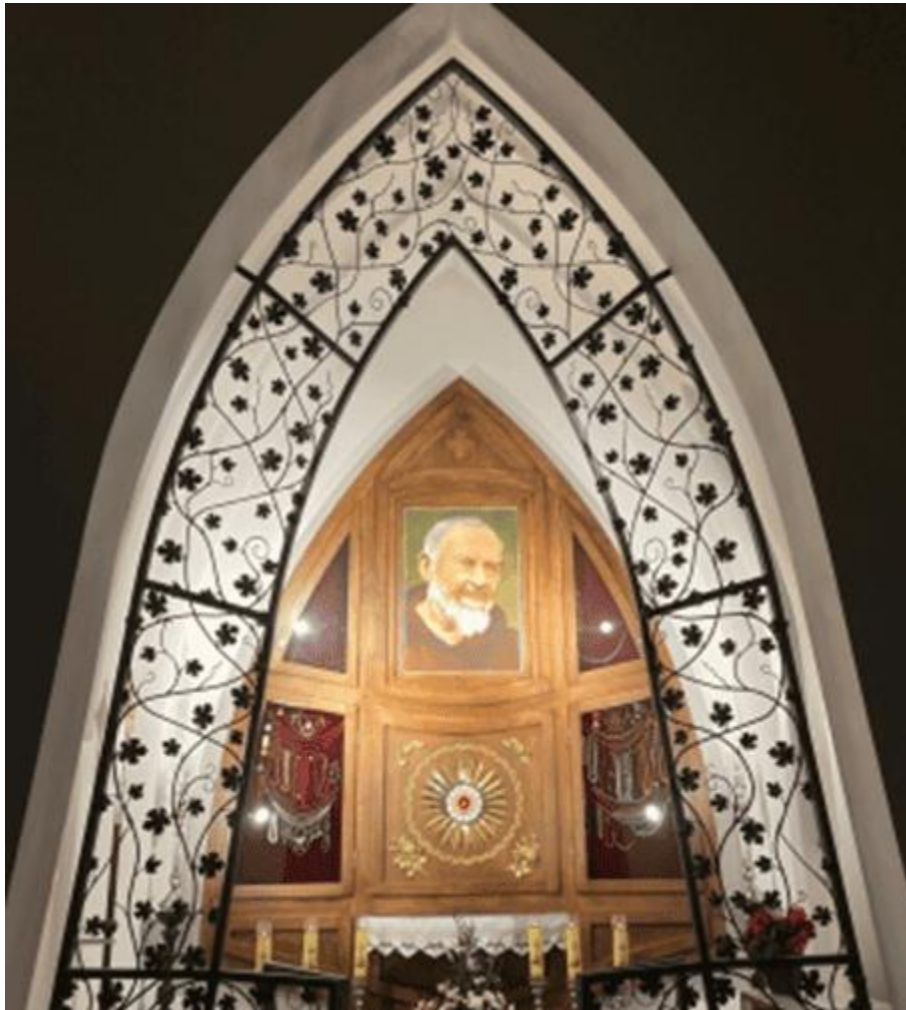


MERCY

By Revd Lucy Austin



Parish Church of the Blessed Padre Pio in Warsaw, Kabaty

In chapter 9 of Matthew's Gospel we meet people who, on the surface, could not be more different. A tax collector sitting at his booth. A synagogue leader kneeling in desperation. A woman suffering in silence for twelve years. A crowd laughing at Jesus because they believe death has already won. Matthew 9.9–13, 18–26

Yet each of them is drawn toward the same thing: mercy.

God says through Hosea, "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice." Jesus repeats those words to the Pharisees: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

St Paul tells us that Abraham was made righteous not through religious achievement, but through faith in the God who gives life to the dead.

The kingdom of God is not built on human worthiness. It is built on divine mercy.

Matthew's calling is startling in its simplicity. Jesus sees a man everyone else has already judged, and says only two words: "Follow me."

No probation. No interrogation. No demand that Matthew first clean himself up.

Grace comes first.

That offended the religiously respectable people around Jesus. They could not understand why a holy teacher would sit at table with sinners.

But Jesus has not come for those convinced of their own righteousness. He has come for the sick, the wounded, the ashamed, the excluded — for those who know their need of mercy.

If we are honest, that means all of us.

The woman with the haemorrhage embodies this beautifully. For twelve years she has lived not only with illness, but with isolation. According to the religious customs of the day, she was perpetually unclean. Imagine the loneliness, the exhaustion, the quiet despair. Yet she believes that even touching the fringe of Christ's garment could heal her.

Jesus does more than heal her body. He restores her dignity. He calls her "daughter."

In a world that had pushed her to the margins, Christ brings her back into the centre of love.

Then comes the ruler's daughter. Everyone else sees finality in death. Jesus sees possibility.

The mourners laugh at him because mercy always appears foolish to those who think the world is governed only by what is visible and measurable.

Jesus takes the girl by the hand, and life returns.

That is exactly the faith Paul speaks of in Romans: faith in the God "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist."

Christian faith is not optimism. It is trust.

Trust that God can bring life where we see only endings.

Hosea warns us against empty religion — outward devotion without inward love.

Sacrifices, rituals, appearances: these can all be substitutes for a heart turned toward God.

The Pharisees knew the scriptures, but they did not recognise mercy standing in front of them.

The danger remains in the Church today.

We can become careful about forms and careless about people.

We can defend respectability while neglecting compassion.

We can become experts in religion and strangers to grace.

Jesus reminds us that the true sign of God's kingdom is mercy: mercy that seeks the lost, touches the unclean, eats with sinners, and raises the dead.

Christianity is not a society of flawless, perfect people.

We are a community who know that we all need healing, all the time.

Christ welcomed Matthew- we cannot dismiss people by their past.

Christ stopped for the suffering woman- we cannot ignore the unseen pain around us.

Christ raised the ruler's daughter- we cannot surrender hope even in places that seem lifeless.

Because:

Mercy is stronger than judgement.

Grace is deeper than sin.

Christ is greater than death.

Today Christ faces us as he faced Matthew.

He sees us completely — our failures, fears, wounds and compromises.

And still he says, "Follow me."

Not because we are worthy.

Because he is merciful.

And in following him, we discover that mercy itself is the heart of God.

With much love and many blessings

LucyA