



Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

My brothers and sisters, sweet is the thought of mercy, but even more so is mercy itself. It is what all men hope for, but unfortunately, not what all men deserve. For while all men wish to receive it, only a few are willing to give it.

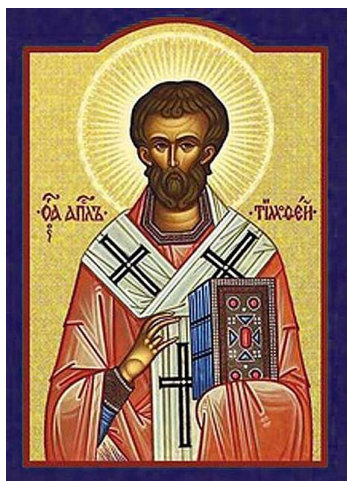
How can a man ask for himself what he refuses to give to another? If he expects to receive any mercy in heaven, he should give mercy on earth. Do we all desire to receive mercy? Let us make mercy our patroness now, and she will free us in the world to come. Yes, there is mercy in heaven, but the road to it is paved by our merciful acts on earth. As Scripture says: *Lord, your mercy is in heaven.*

There is, therefore, an earthly as well as heavenly mercy, that is to say, a human and a divine mercy. Human mercy has compassion on the miseries of the poor. Divine mercy grants forgiveness of sins. Whatever human mercy bestows here on earth, divine mercy will return to us in our homeland. In this life God feels cold and hunger in all who are stricken with poverty; for, remember, he once said: *What you have done to the least of my brothers you have done to me.* Yes, God who sees fit to give his mercy in heaven wishes it to be a reality here on earth.

What kind of people are we? When God gives, we wish to receive, but when he begs, we refuse to give. Remember, it was Christ who said: *I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat.* When the poor are starving, Christ too hungers. Do not neglect to improve the unhappy conditions of the poor, if you wish to ensure that your own sins be forgiven you. Christ hungers now, my brethren; it is he who deigns to hunger and thirst in the persons of the poor. And what he will return in heaven tomorrow is what he receives here on earth today.

What do you wish for, what do you pray for, my dear brothers and sisters, when you come to church? Is it mercy? How can it be anything else? Show mercy, then, while you are on earth, and mercy will be shown to you in heaven. A poor person asks you for something; you ask God for something. He begs for a morsel of food; you beg for eternal life. Give to the beggar so that you may merit to receive from Christ. For he it is who says: *Give and it will be given to you.* It baffles me that you have the impudence to ask for what you do not want to give. Give when you come to church. Give to the poor. Give them whatever your resources will allow.

Caesarius of Arles, "Divine and Human Mercy," in *The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite*, vol. 4, Ordinary Time, Weeks 1-17 (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975), Office of Readings for Monday of the Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time; *Sermo* 25.1, CCSL 103:111-12.



Born around 470 in what is now France, Caesarius entered the famous monastery of Lérins as a young man. He became Bishop of Arles around 502 and served there until his death in 542. His feast is celebrated on August 27.



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