***FEBRUARY REFLECTION 2024***

***Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.***

***Invocation*** *(Make the sign of the cross as the leader prays the invocation.)*

Leader: *+ Blessed are the merciful,*

***All: for they will be shown mercy.***

*Leader: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.*

***All: As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

***Psalm 136 (pray antiphonally)***

***O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,***

***for his mercy endures forever.***

***Give thanks to the God of gods,***

***for his mercy endures forever.***

***Give thanks to the Lord of lords,***

***for his mercy endures forever.***

***Who alone has wrought marvelous works,***

***for his mercy endures forever;***

***who in wisdom made the heavens,***

***for his mercy endures forever;***

***who spread the earth on the waters,***

***for his mercy endures forever.***

***It was he who made the great lights,***

***for his mercy endures forever;***

***the sun to rule in the day,***

***for his mercy endures forever.***

***the moon and the stars in the night***

***for his mercy endures forever.***

***To the God of heaven give thanks,***

***for his mercy endures forever.***

***Scripture*** *Then Peter approaching asked him, “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?”**Jesus answered, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.* *That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants.* *When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount.* *Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt.**At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.’* *Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan.*

*When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount.He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, ‘Pay back what you owe.’* *Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’* *But he refused. Instead, he had him put in prison until he paid back the debt.*

*Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair.* *His master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to.* *Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?’* *Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt.**So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart.” Matthew 18:21-35*

**(Pause for a few moments to meditate on the reading.)**

***Reflection*** *In Matthew 18:21-35, we find a powerful lesson on forgiveness, a theme that resonates with mental health and emotional well-being. The passage tells the parable of the unforgiving servant who, after being forgiven a massive debt by his master, refuses to show the same mercy to a fellow servant who owes him a much smaller sum. The master, upon learning of this lack of compassion, condemns the unforgiving servant, emphasizing the importance of forgiving others as we have been forgiven.*

*Reflecting on this passage, reminds us of the weight that grudges and unforgiveness can place on our mental health. When we hold onto anger, resentment, or bitterness, it’s like carrying a heavy burden that constantly weighs us down. These negative emotions can fester, leading to anxiety, depression, and strained relationships.*

*Saint John Paul II once said, “To forgive is not to condone, it is to refuse to allow the past to dictate the future.” It is not about excusing or forgetting the harm done to us, but rather about liberating ourselves from our own negative emotions.*

*Forgiveness is an act of self-compassion; it allows us to free our minds from the torment of bitterness and to make room for healing and growth. In the context of mental health, forgiving others can be a powerful tool for reducing stress, anxiety, and depression. It does not mean that we ignore or minimize the pain we have experienced; instead, it means choosing to let go of the emotional baggage that comes with holding onto grudges. By doing so, we open ourselves to the possibility of inner peace and emotional well-being.*

*In this passage, we learn that forgiveness is not just a moral obligation but also a path to emotional healing and mental freedom. By following the example of Christ, we can release the weight of unforgiveness and find solace in Saint John Paul II’s wisdom, allowing our past to guide us toward a healthier, more hopeful future.*

*Luke Brown, LPCC*

***Prayer O God, whose mercies are without number***

***and whose treasure of goodness is infinite,***

***graciously increase the faith of the people consecrated to you,***

***that all may grasp and rightly understand***

***by whose love they have been created,***

***through whose Blood they have been redeemed,***

***and by whose Spirit they have been reborn.***

***Through Christ our Lord. Amen.***

***Sign of the Cross***

