

Tuesday in Lent 4

*That it may please thee to have mercy upon all mankind,
We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.*

Surely such a plea can't mean mercy for the absolute worst of the human race. Surely not criminals, like the man in the news today who was arrested for repeatedly raping children. Surely not the man who abducted a young woman from her job as a convenience store cashier, drove her away, and killed her. Surely not Osama Bin Laden and other terrorists who seek to destroy this country and those we love.

Hmmm...mercy upon all mankind. *All* mankind. And not a grudging mercy. We want God to be "pleased" to show mercy to all mankind.

When I'm angry with someone, when it's all I can do to pray—and even that is hard if I'm really angry—the prayer often takes the form of throwing that person into a room like a cave, semi-dark, with no exit. I drag him or her in there mentally, or find a ledge and push the offender into the space below.

And then I walk away. Only I haven't left the person alone; Jesus is there, too. And Jesus works it out.

So we pray. We pray for God truly to have mercy on all mankind, the worst and best of the lot. Moreover, we pray that God will be "pleased" to have mercy.

Jesus is in the room, so we can walk away at least having done what God has asked, and that is to pray for our enemies and those who offend us.

God, have mercy on us all. Fill us with your Spirit, and when we have run out of our own limited compassion and kindness, mercifully grant us those gifts through your Son.—LHF

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That it may please thee to give us true repentance; to forgive us all our sins, negligences, and ignorances; and to endue us with the grace of thy Holy Spirit to amend our lives according to thy holy Word,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

Jonah is one of my favorite biblical characters. He runs away from God because God wants him to convince the people of Ninevah to repent. He hates the Ninevites, and with good reason. They kill; they maim; they ruin the lives of everyone they touch. God intends that, through Jonah's preaching, they will be converted.

But Jonah does not want the Ninevites to repent. He wants them destroyed. If they repent, God will give them another chance.