

**Homily – Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent
Mass with 11th Graders from Catholic Schools – March 24, 2023**

Our life and our faith are clear and simple, but hard! When we listen to the gospel, and learn about Jesus, his words and deeds shine in contrast with our lives. It is painful to acknowledge that we fall short. We always fall short! But at the same time, the words and deeds of Jesus are a constant reminder of God's mercy for us. The Lord is understanding and compassionate but demanding.

As we heard in the gospel, some people in Jerusalem are unwilling to accept Jesus. He is obnoxious to them. They are unable to recognize the face of the Father's mercy in Him. Everything about Jesus causes unbearable pain to some of the leaders of his people. As they refuse to accept God's mercy – through repentance and conversion – they keep condemning themselves to feel envy, wrath, and pride. These feelings are like drugs for the soul. These people would rather hold on to their position, their ideology, their sins, than make space for God's love. That pain keeps obscuring their spiritual vision, so they keep digging deeper into the abyss of their greed and injustice. Blinded by their own prejudice, they are unable to acknowledge that Jesus is their Savior. Their pain is so intense that they want to kill Him.

There is staggering contrast between the wisdom of God and the foolishness of human pride. We have a natural tendency to be skeptical and closed-minded, shutting ourselves from others. But Jesus invites us to be open to the possibility of truth, beauty, and goodness in our lives. He is the source of all three: truth, beauty, and

goodness. He invites us to embrace his mercy: the fullness of truth, beauty, and goodness. All three are summarize in one short phrase: God loves you!

Turn to the person next to you and tell them: God loves you! Louder: God loves you! ... That's right! He is so madly in love with you that he is willing to die for you; so literally, that he already did. If you embrace that truth, he will set your heart on fire. Pray for that fire. He will lead you let others know that God loves them too. Jesus wants you to go crazy too; crazy of love! He wants you to go fight injustice anywhere and everywhere. You will begin to feel the fire growing withing you when you do things like talking to the homeless and refugees, defending the sanctity of human life, tutoring immigrant children, or spending time with the elderly. Do volunteer work at Catholic Charities. If you need an adult to go with you, well, there is the first person to whom God is sending you.

Pope Francis says: (quote) *“A young person stands on two feet as adults do, but unlike adults, whose feet are parallel, they always have one foot forward, ready to set out, to spring ahead. Always racing onward. To talk about young people is to talk about promise and to talk about joy.”*(end of quote) Are you young? ... I want to see that joy. Are you convinced that God loves you? ... I can't hear you! I want you to yell: God loves me madly! ... Go brag about it!

Jesus knows your struggles, he understands them and he suffers with you. He gives you his mom to hug you. So, pray to Our Lady of Guadalupe. She is waiting to send you as her ambassador.