

**HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE, APOSTOLIC NUNCIO**  
**THURSDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT, MARCH 30, 2017**  
**ST. ANSELM ABBEY, WASHINGTON, DC**

I am very pleased to be here at St. Anselm Abbey this morning and in a special way I wish to greet Abbot Mark Cooper and all the members of the monastic community here for their kind invitation and for their witness to God through prayer and work. As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Pope's personal representative in this country, I wish to express the Holy Father's personal closeness to each of you gathered here this morning.

Our first reading is taken from Exodus. Israel has grown tired of following God. Moses had gone up the mountain to encounter the Lord and to receive the Law from God, but he delayed in descending from the mountain. In their impatience, the Israelites fashioned an image of the golden calf and began to worship it.

As the Psalmist says, "*They exchanged the glory of God for the image of the ox that eats grass.*" (Ps 106:20) It seems impossible to believe that the people would attribute to this idol the saving work of God who had freed them from slavery in Egypt, yet that is what they did. They attempted to avoid the divine mystery by constructing a comprehensible God according to their own plans and own ideas.

How many times have we done the same – attempted to make God according to our likeness or preferences? How many times have we, like the Israelites, developed spiritual amnesia, forgetting the good that God has done in our lives? How many more times do we, through our pride, attribute to ourselves great accomplishments rather than giving God the glory?!!!

In Exodus, it is the forgetfulness and ingratitude of the people that provokes the wrath of the Lord! The Lord knew the choice of his people. They preferred the golden calf to Him. The Lord too knows us *and* our daily idols which we continue to worship and follow, preferring to listen to ourselves rather than God. The wrath of the Lord flares up! The wrath of God signifies the end of indifference. God will not tolerate doing whatever we wish with the gifts that He has given us, abusing the many gifts and talents which he has bestowed; using them for our own benefit rather than for the good of others; using them to exclude and control rather than to serve. There will be a judgment for the different forms of idolatry.

Moses too knows the people and their weaknesses, but rather than seek glory for himself, he intercedes for the people, carrying out a dialogue with God, beseeching the Lord for mercy. Moses tries his best to persuade God not to punish by destroying this people. He reminds God of what He did to save the people and what the Egyptians will now say. He places before God the fidelity of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He appeals to the heart of God, just as Abraham had done for Sodom and Gomorrah – for mercy!

We also discover that God has a desire to show mercy! If God had destroyed the Israelites, some would have thought that God was unable to bring the project of salvation to completion and fulfill His promises or unable to overcome sin. God cannot and will not accept this. He relents. The one true God is the God who saves, who forgives, who shows mercy.

Moses is a model for us, because through his intercession, he simultaneously shows his love for his neighbor (the Israelites) for whom he pleads and God whose mercy must be shown. Moses does not ask God to turn a blind eye to the sin of the people but he appeals to the Lord's goodness to offer the people yet another chance. He appeals to God to show that His love is greater than any sin. Moses, as an intercessor, later in Exodus, was willing to offer himself for his people.

Moses was but a type of Jesus, who is our eternal High Priest, who never ceases to intercede before the Father to intercede for us. Jesus, at Calvary, would lay down his life for his friends, and, from the Cross would say, "*Father, forgive them they do not know what they are doing*" and to the dying thief would utter: "*This day you will be with me in Paradise.*"

Today, as a Church, let us intercede once more before the face of the Eternal Father, asking Him to have mercy on us and on the whole world. Let us *give thanks to the Lord for He is good; his mercy endures forever.*