



Malice toward none

Bringing mercy to the world of politics

On March 4, 1865, Abraham Lincoln took the oath of office for a second time. As he stood on the east front of the Capitol that day, the Civil War was nearing its end.

In the space of just four years, almost 620,000 soldiers — about 2 percent of the population of the United States — had died from battle, wounds or disease. In terms proportional to our current

population, this would amount to a death toll of six million.

And in the midst of this sea of carnage, this is what President Lincoln said:

“With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for

him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan — to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.”

Mercy is in short supply

“Mercy is the name of God,” said Pope Benedict XVI. Pope St. John Paul II called mercy “love’s second name.” Pope Francis taught that mercy “constitutes the Church.” To Pope Leo XIV, works of mercy are the true test of “the authenticity of our worship.”

Through the liturgy, the sacraments and the scriptures, God reveals Himself to us as the God of mercy. Each day in the Liturgy of the Hours, the Gospel Canticles at morning and evening prayer remind us that God “has remembered His promise of mercy.”

And yet mercy is in ever shorter supply in our culture. As Pope St. John Paul II wrote in 1980, “[T]he present-day mentality, more perhaps than that of people in the past, seems opposed to a God of mercy, and in fact tends to exclude from life and to remove from the human heart the very idea of mercy.” (Encyclical Letter *Rich in Mercy*).

These words have lost none of their significance. Sadly, today’s culture might take as its motto “malice toward all and charity for none.” How often do we see mercy in the way that individuals interact with one another? Where do we see mercy in the way people treat others on social media? Could we imagine any modern political leader speaking as President Lincoln did?



Mercy lies at the heart of our faith

It cannot be like this for the followers of Christ. The Eucharist that we share is the sacrament of mercy. Politics is one of the highest forms of charity because it seeks the common good. Since mercy is one of the fruits of charity, it must color both our individual relationships and our work in the political world.

As Pope St. John Paul II said, “[M]ercy impels us to roll up our sleeves and set about restoring dignity to millions of people.” (*Rich in Mercy*, 18).

The first step in this merciful mission in the public square is to consider actions taken by the government and to discern whether they are commensurate with mercy. Is the government acting with compassion for those in need? Are the laws that are being passed truly just? Are those

laws being enforced with fairness and proportionality?

Bishop Peter Libasci has put mercy at the forefront of how New Hampshire Catholics should respond to current challenges, like the immigration crisis. In his January 2026 letter titled *Response to Aggression*, the Bishop urged that we commit ourselves to the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy:

- Feeding the hungry
- Giving drink to the thirsty
- Sheltering the homeless
- Clothing the naked
- Visiting the sick
- Burying the dead
- Admonishing the sinner
- Instructing the ignorant
- Counseling the doubtful
- Comforting the sorrowful
- Patiently bearing wrongs
- Forgiving all injuries
- Praying for the living and the dead.

We can easily see what these works would mean to people who are in need of our mercy — immigrant families who have lost a breadwinner, people who do not have enough food, elders who have no one to visit them and on and on.

‘His mercy endures forever’

The Good Samaritan is our model of mercy. What is the answer we would give to the question that the scholar of the law posed to Jesus: “Who is my neighbor?”

“Jesus replied, ‘Which of these three, in your opinion, was a neighbor to the robber’s victim?’ The man answered, ‘The one who treated him with mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’” (*Lk 10:25-37*).

This is our commission, our “political platform,” so to speak. We will be credible witnesses to the Lord of Mercy only if we ourselves are bringers of mercy.

We will know that we have faithfully carried out that mission if those in need of mercy recognize in us the very presence of the Lord, and if they are moved to say, along with the Psalmist:

“Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; His mercy endures forever.” ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Watch “Finding Communion,” the companion podcast to this column:



Read Bishop Peter Libasci’s letter, *Response to Aggression*:



Watch Robert Dunn’s recent testimony at the New Hampshire State House:



Robert Dunn is the Director of Public Policy for the Diocese of Manchester. He is a member of the first group of Catholic leaders from around the U.S. designated as Mathis Liturgical Leaders by the University of Notre Dame’s McGrath Institute for Church Life. Dunn graduated from the College of the Holy Cross and Georgetown University Law Center.

