

What is there “Therefore”
there for in our second reading?

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God,”

Paul has spent chapters 9-11 in Romans
(over 2,000 words in English)
exploring core elements of God’s relationship with humanity,
God’s perpetual call to life,
humanity’s resistance,
and how we humans can find our way back to the God
who always desires our return.

So Paul continues,
“I appeal to you, therefore, by the mercies of God.”

It’s another way of recalling what anchors us in God-
the Hebrew center of the Law, the prophets, the writings,
and the Christian gospel.

God calls us to keep God’s unending mercies ever before our eyes,

God calls us to live by an essential truth,
stated elsewhere with different language
but describing the same thing:
merciful love.

- “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind and your neighbor as yourself
- “Faith, hope, and love abide, and the greatest of these is love”
- “For God so loved the world....
- “Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God ... for God is love”

All our forward motion should proceed out of that enduring reality of love.

What are we to do?

How can we respond?

Paul says.....

present your bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to God,
which is your spiritual worship.

The apostle Paul never lets us forget
that we are embodied creatures.

Everything we think, say, or do, we do in a body.

Presenting our bodies
means staying aware each day that our body
is the primary location
in which we actually express our heart, soul, strength, and mind.

If we want to know our inmost motives and values,
we can look at what we do each day in our bodies.

Every day in all the places we go,
all the things we do,
and all the decisions and recommendations we make,
we are presenting our bodies.

Over time, our actions, choices, and recommendations
cumulatively create a body of work,
so to speak.

The goal is to have a body, a body of work,
that is a living “thusia” (in Greek),
a living, breathing, daily “offering to God.” “

Sacrifice” (the NRSV translation) is a bit misleading.
In the first century,
an act of worship often entailed the ritual slaughter of an animal—
a dove, sheep, bull, etc.
In today’s context,
it might be clearer to use the broader term,
“offering” rather than “sacrifice.”

Paul is asking us,
Because of God’s abundant mercy to you,
present your life as an offering to God.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed.

In the U.S., we live in a culture
that inundates us with advertising
designed to keep us conformed to this world.

The marketing/media industry spends billions of dollars annually
to flood televisions, websites, billboards, email, regular mail.

They intrude even onto gas pump screens
or the screens on debit/credit card readers.

They seek to define us essentially as consumers,
individual economic units
existing for the sake of larger market shares.

In addition, each day
our families, friends, organizations, religions, political parties,
and society at large
pressure us to fit in,
to stay within the boundaries of tradition, custom, or practice
that mark who we're "supposed" to be.

Not being conformed to this world is a tall order.

The world will fight at every stage to convince us
to look the other way
rather than glimpse the injustice,
hatred,
oppression,
immorality,
greed,
and violence that surround us.

It takes transformation,
renewal of the mind,
to detach ourselves from the world's attempts
to occupy us with things that do not matter.

Paul implores us to shake off the effects of this world,
attend to the things that do matter,
and "discern ... the will of God,
what is good, acceptable, and perfect."

God asks us to present St John's-
our community of faith –
and all the communities of which we are a part
as an offering to God.

Have you thought of us gathered here,
Or your school
Or your block

Or your office
As an offering to God?

Paul also never forgets
that we do not just exist
as individuals in our individual bodies.

We exist as members
of the body of Christ.
God enables that body
to create its own body of work
—prophecy, ministry, teaching,
challenging and encouraging,
giving, leading, and being compassionate.

We can do those things alone,
but we do them with more discernment and impact
as part of a larger body.

None of us can do it all.

No single community can do it all, either.

But God empowers each community
to do all it is called to do in its context.

It makes a difference to see church and community
not as nouns but verbs,

not as a place to go
but as a living offering to God.

The transforming power of God,
the renewing of our minds,
the living offering,
the embodiment of God's endless mercies
set us all into motion
and point us toward what is good, acceptable, and perfect
this day, this week and always.
Amen.