HOMILY – Rev. Robert Schramm, OSFS
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 2016

Most of the time when we gather for Mass, we begin by saying what the tax collector says in the story we just read: “Lord, be merciful.”

Reminds me of a liturgy workshop I was at quite a few years ago taught by a Jesuit.
Now there was a time when linking a Jesuit with a liturgy workshop would have been considered an oxymoron—self-contradictory. They used to say that the definition of a good Jesuit liturgy was one where nobody got hurt.
Not so true anymore, but there was a time …

At any rate, the Jesuit who led this workshop was J-Glen Murray. Besides being a Jesuit, he also happens to be black.
He said, “Lord, have Mercy” at Mass should really sound like when his grandma used to say it -- Lawd, have MER-cy.

There’s a great sense of dependence when you say it like that.
It’s like a reminder that you don’t get anywhere in life without God’s mercy.

So we start Mass ordinarily with this reminder of who we are and whose we are.
As Pope Francis reminded us all in an interview soon after he was elected Pope:
   We ARE sinners, to whom GOD has shown great mercy.

That’s put us in the right frame of mind for the rest of Mass:
   to open our hearts to what God wants to say to us
   to let God further instill in us an attitude of gratitude.

St. Francis de Sales says:
   Humility believes that we can do nothing in and of ourselves:
      while on the contrary, generosity makes us say with St. Paul,
      ‘I can do all things in the One who strengthens me.’
   Humility makes us mistrust ourselves, generosity makes us trust in God.
   These two virtues of humility and generosity are so closely joined to one another they can never be separated.

We begin Mass humbled so that we might be open to what God longs to say to us.

Then we turn our hearts to gratitude for all that God has done and for what God promises to do in and through ordinary folks such as us.
Important to be aware that there is always a Pharisee lurking somewhere inside each of us thinking we need to show God, or somebody, our stuff.

I found this quote from another Jesuit, John Kavanaugh, who died a few years ago. It’s about St. Paul, who at one time was a very proud Pharisee. Kavanaugh says:

A faultless Pharisee, having given up the pretense of being a self-made man, Paul learned the freedom of the poor soul who one day, in the back of the temple, could only mutter, ‘Lord, have mercy.’

Real freedom comes from knowing who you are and whose you are. Freedom comes from practicing the virtue of humility. Three years ago I used another quote from Francis de Sales about humility. I think it bears repeating here today. Francis’ life straddled the 16th and 17th centuries, so some of the images may sound quaint. He says:

We glory in what we claim as our own.
The nobility of our ancestors, the favor of famous people and popularity are things that are not IN us.
Some people become proud and arrogant because they ride a fine horse, wear a feather in their hat, or are dressed in fine clothes.
Who doesn't see how foolish this is.
For if there is any glory in such things it belongs to the horse, the bird or the tailor.
What pettiness it is to borrow esteem from a horse, a feather or from some fleeting fashion.

Comedian Phyllis Diller said she learned humility from mirrors.

Year of Mercy soon comes to an end.

We have the privilege to be the constant recipients of God's mercy if we will open ourselves to that.
We also are privileged to be the extensions of that mercy to every person we meet.

So we began this Eucharist acknowledging our dependence of MERCY. We will conclude with a great shout of GRATITUDE.

Then we're called to live our lives between mercy and generosity.