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Wednesday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time

Date: Wednesday, October 8, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Jonah 4:1–11
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 86:3–6, 9–10 | **Response:** Psalm 86:15
Gospel Acclamation: Romans 8:15bc
Gospel Reading: Luke 11:1–4
Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe**.**

The readings today are about a mercy that unsettles us. A mercy that stretches us beyond our instincts, that stirs our sense of justice, that saves more than we think deserves saving. This is not an idea to be studied, but a grace to be lived. A mercy to receive on our knees, and to pass on with open hands.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The prophet Jonah is angry. But not for the reasons prophets usually are. He is not upset at sin, or at the stubbornness of a people refusing to repent. No—Jonah is angry because people *did* repent. Because God forgave them.

Nineveh, a violent, pagan city—the old enemy of Israel—has heard Jonah's call to repentance. And to Jonah's dismay, they turn from their evil. And God, who is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger and rich in kindness," spares them. Jonah, rather than rejoicing, complains: "This is why I fled! I *knew* you were merciful!"

What a strange confession. Jonah is not surprised by God's mercy—he is scandalised by it. He quotes Scripture with clenched teeth. He wants the God of covenant, but only for his own people. He wants mercy for himself, but not for Nineveh.

As Pope Francis reminded us, mercy is "an unconditional and unmerited act of love"—and that is what unsettles Jonah most of all. He does not yet see that mercy is not weakness, but the most perfect expression of God's justice.

And so he sits in the sun, sulking. When a plant grows up to give him shade, he is pleased. But when it withers, he rages again. And God, with a patience far greater than Jonah's, speaks to him: *You care about this plant that you did not*

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grow. Should I not care about Nineveh, with 120,000 people who do not know their right hand from their left?

Jonah's story is not just about a city saved. It is about a heart that refuses to grow. It is a mirror held up to every one of us who has ever been tempted to resent the mercy of God for someone else. To all of us who would rather God be predictable than generous.

In our own context—in Zimbabwe today—how easy it is to fall into Jonah's weariness. When those in power act with impunity, when justice is delayed or denied, when repentance seems absent and corruption thrives, we long for judgment. But God longs for healing. And even now, in places we have given up on, God may be working repentance that we cannot yet see.

There is a difficult truth here. God's mercy often reaches the people we don't think deserve it. But that same mercy is the only reason we ourselves are still standing.

There is a quiet resonance here with the prophet Shemaiah, remembered in the older Roman Martyrology. He appears only briefly in Scripture (cf. 1 Kings 12:22), at a moment of national fracture, when King Rehoboam is poised to wage war against the northern tribes of Israel. Shemaiah delivers a word from the Lord: *Do not go up; do not fight against your brothers.* Then, having spoken, he steps back into silence. No long speech, no drama—just obedience. His prophecy was not to predict the future, but to prevent bloodshed. In this, Shemaiah stands in contrast to Jonah: one sulks over God's mercy, the other quietly serves it. And in a land like ours, where conflict can sit just beneath the surface, his brief appearance reminds us that sometimes the holiest voice is not the loudest, but the one that says, quietly and firmly, *stop*. His silent obedience, like Jesus' concise and communal prayer, reflects what the Church calls a "quiet, communal fidelity"—a way of living that listens, responds, and trusts (cf. CCC 2857).

And so we turn to the Gospel of Luke (Luke 11:1–4). Jesus is praying, and the disciples are watching. One of them, moved not by instruction but by example, says, "Lord, teach us to pray." And Jesus responds, not with explanation, but with a prayer.

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Not many words. No lofty language. Just five petitions, shaped like a ladder for the heart. Two reach up to God: *Father, may your name be held holy. May your kingdom come.* And three reach down into daily life: *Give us bread. Forgive us. Lead us not into temptation.*

The Lord's Prayer, as the Catechism teaches, contains "the sum of all the good things which we must hope for" (CCC 17). Its first three petitions glorify the Father; the last three draw down His mercy into our daily need (CCC 2857). And like Shemaiah's act of restraint, this prayer is not about performance, but fidelity. It binds us together—not only in our needs, but in our responsibilities to one another.

This is the prayer of children. It is tender. It is bold. It trusts. And it includes everyone: *Give us. Forgive us. Lead us.* It teaches us not to pray as individuals trying to earn a blessing, but as a people who are already beloved.

It is a prayer that reminds us who God is—and who we are not. That His Kingdom is not ours to build by force. That bread is not earned, but received. That forgiveness is not a negotiation, but a gift. That we are not strong enough to resist evil alone—we need His help.

This is not a formula to memorise, but a way of life to enter into. This is not an idea to be studied, but a grace to be lived.

The Psalm (Psalm 86:3–6, 9–10) gives words to this grace: *"You, O Lord, are good and forgiving, full of love to all who call."* This is a prayer from someone who knows they need mercy. Someone who does not try to impress God, but simply cries out. This kind of prayer is the soil from which true justice and peace must grow—because it flows from humility, not pride.

St Ignatius invites us in the Spiritual Exercises to enter into these Scriptures not just with the mind, but with the heart and the senses. Sit for a moment under Jonah's plant. Feel the heat of the sun, the relief of the shade, and then the sting when it withers. Where in your life have you cared more about your own comfort than someone else's conversion?

Then imagine yourself next to Jesus, watching Him pray. You hear His voice—not hurried, not anxious, but steady. When He says *Father*, something in you stirs. This is not performance. This is relationship. And suddenly, the prayer He

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gives you is not just a list of petitions—it is a doorway into greater trust.

This prayer, lived well, becomes the pattern of mercy in a broken world. In Zimbabwe, where the weight of daily survival can make prayer feel like a luxury, the Lord's Prayer brings us back to what we most need: enough for today, forgiveness from yesterday, and strength for the road ahead.

And it teaches us to want for others what we want for ourselves. Not just food, but dignity. Not just stability, but hope. Not just peace, but belonging.

God is asking us to be people of mercy—not only to receive it, but to extend it. Not only to pray it, but to live it. The measure of our prayer is not how eloquently we speak, but how deeply we forgive. Not how well we understand mercy, but how far we are willing to go to make it real.

And so, if this prayer is not an idea to be studied but a grace to be lived, then the Church invites us to live it not only with our lips, but through the sacraments—especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. If we have hesitated to forgive, or to be forgiven, perhaps now is the time to bring our hearts to that quiet place where mercy meets us.

So let us go into the week ahead not with clenched fists like Jonah, but with open hands like Christ. Let us pray as He taught us. Let us forgive as we have been forgiven. Let us hunger for mercy not only for ourselves, but for our enemies.

And let us trust that even Nineveh can change. Even our hearts can be made new.

I leave you with three questions, drawn from the spirit of the Exercises, for your prayer today:

- Where have I been like Jonah—angry, resentful, or reluctant to share God's mercy with someone who has hurt me?
- When I pray the Lord's Prayer, which part do I hesitate to truly mean? What word or phrase do I need to let sink deeper into my heart?
- How is God calling me this week to make His mercy visible—in my words, in my choices, or in my silence?

Amen.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.