



## Memorial of St Alphonsus Rodriguez, religious



**Date:** Friday, October 31, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C

**First Reading:** Romans 9:1–5

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 147:12–15, 19–20

**Gospel Acclamation:** John 10:27

**Gospel Reading:** Luke 14:1–6

**Preached at:** the Chapel of Emmaus House in the Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe.

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**T**he readings today are about the aching heart of God—a love that cannot stay still when his children suffer, a love that breaks rules in order to heal, a love that longs to gather all people into mercy.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our first reading from the Letter to the Romans opens with Paul’s voice trembling between love and sorrow. He speaks as a man torn in two. Israel is his flesh, his family, his story. He remembers the promises, the covenants, the prophets, the glory that once filled the Temple. And yet, he sees that his own people have not recognised the One for whom all those promises were made. His lament is not bitter. It is the cry of a heart that mirrors Christ’s own—one that would rather be cut off from heaven itself than see others left outside its gates. Here is the measure of true compassion: to love so deeply that one’s own salvation feels secondary to the salvation of another. Paul’s grief becomes a window into divine mercy. For the gifts of God, he will later say, are irrevocable. They cannot be revoked because God himself cannot unlove.

Psalm 147 sings this truth with joy. “He has strengthened the bars of your gates, he blesses your children within you.” The psalmist rejoices not in walls that divide but in gates that open. God’s blessing secures, yes—but it also invites. It protects, but not by exclusion—it welcomes. In the psalm’s rhythm we hear the steady heartbeat of a faithful God, one who “sends out his word to the earth, and swiftly runs his command.” In the midst of hunger and hardship, God’s word still runs swiftly across Zimbabwe—through small acts of courage, through those who feed the hungry, through teachers who keep teaching when wages fail. God’s word races faster than despair.

And then, in the Gospel according to Luke, the Word-made-flesh steps once more into a house full of watchers. It is the Sabbath, and the tension is thick as bread before the meal. A man stands before him, swollen with dropsy (oedema), his body heavy with trapped water, as though the very life within him cannot flow. The room holds its breath. Jesus, knowing their hearts, asks: “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” Silence answers him. Their silence, like the man’s swelling, reveals what happens when compassion is dammed up—when the flow of mercy is blocked by fear, custom, or pride. Jesus heals him. He restores flow where there was stagnation, feeling where there was numbness, and breath where there was suffocation.

This is the heart of today’s readings: the difference between a faith that guards and a faith that gives. The Pharisees guarded the Sabbath, but Jesus gave life. Paul’s kin guarded tradition, but he gave his heart. God guards Jerusalem, but only in order to give peace to her children. The divine logic is not possession but pouring-out; not boundaries but belonging.

In our own context, this Gospel is not a distant debate about Sabbath rules. It speaks directly into our communities, where sometimes bureaucracy or pride or the exhaustion of poverty can make us slow to reach out, to help, to heal. How often do we watch rather than act? In a nation where people queue for bread and fuel, where unemployment drives young minds to despair, the temptation is to grow numb, to preserve our own Sabbath of safety. But Christ calls us to interrupt that rest for the sake of mercy. The law is holy, but mercy is its fulfilment.

The Ignatian way teaches us to imagine ourselves in this Gospel scene. Picture the table, the murmuring of the guests, the swollen man standing awkwardly before Jesus. Where do you stand? Among the watchers? Beside the suffering man? Or at Christ’s side, daring to touch, to heal, to break silence? The examen this evening could begin here: where did I see suffering today, and did I stop to act or simply to watch?

Saint Alphonsus Rodríguez was a simple Jesuit brother, not a priest, not a scholar, but the porter of a Jesuit college in Majorca. He never studied theology in Rome or preached to crowds. His vocation was to open doors. Each morning he swept the steps and welcomed whoever came—students, beggars, merchants, priests. He had no pulpit but a threshold; no audience but the people who happened to knock. Yet through that doorway passed patience, humour, and grace.

He listened to people's worries, shared what little he had, and offered each visitor the dignity of being received. One of those who often sought his counsel was a young Jesuit, Peter Claver, whom Alphonsus quietly inspired to go to the missions and become the apostle of enslaved Africans.

That is how mercy works: quietly, faithfully, through open doors and open hearts. Saint Alphonsus shows us that holiness does not depend on brilliance or position but on love made practical—answering the door, listening when it would be easier to turn away, bringing peace to those who cross our path.

And perhaps that is our call too. In our homes, in our workplaces, in our parishes, we each stand at many thresholds. Mercy must move from the doorway of the heart into the streets of life—into the queues, the classrooms, the crowded taxis, the kitchen tables where fatigue sits heavy. God's mercy flows; it cannot stay bottled behind custom or creed. It breaks through the walls of pride, fear, and despair, bringing life where there was stillness. Let us be channels, not barriers, of that mercy.

As we pray this morning, may we ask:

- Where in my life have I allowed fear, pride, or fatigue to block the flow of mercy?
- When I see suffering—on the streets, in the queues, in my community—do I act as a watcher or a healer?
- How might I, in the spirit of Ignatius, let my prayer today lead to concrete love tomorrow?

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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.