

**Homily for Fr. Thomas Lind, SCJ**  
**Mass of Christian Burial**  
**April 18, 2024**

Delivered by **Fr. Vien Nguyen, SCJ**, provincial superior of the US Province of the Priests of the Sacred Heart

**Readings:**

Isa 25:6a, 7-9;

Rom 8:31b-35, 37-39;

Matt 5:1-12a

**Theme:** “Do what is right, seek what is good, walk humbly before the Lord”

Our confrere, Tom Lind, did not leave any specific funeral instructions. I guess he granted the homilist—in this case, me—the freedom to preach as he saw fit. This was his way of saying, “Surprise me!” To surprise and honor Tom, I would like to focus on the phrase displayed prominently in his room: **“Do what is right, seek what is good, walk humbly before the Lord.”** This phrase is taken from the prophet Micah, who, in the previous verses, asks God what sacrifice would be acceptable. Burnt offerings? Thousands of rams? Rivers of oil? God answers, “To act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.” Allow me some time to unpack the meaning of the verse.

**To act justly.** Injustice was a significant issue in ancient Israel as people exploited one another. The Prophet Amos strongly condemned those who exploited the poor, calling them "cows of Bashan" and warning that the Lord would not accept their sacrifices. The Hebrew prophets called people to change their unjust behaviors and reorient their lives towards God by learning to do good and avoid evil. The prophet Micah also preached this message, urging people to do what is good. This involved helping vulnerable individuals who were being taken advantage of, advocating for them, and changing social structures to prevent injustice. For Micah and the other prophets, acting justly required right relationships or proper conduct toward others, treating them as the image of God.

**To love mercy.** “Love mercy” contains the Hebrew word *hesed*, which has several meanings, including steadfast, loyal, and faithful love based on a promise, agreement, or covenant. However, it mainly denotes loyalty to one's commitments. In this context, God wants us to honor the commitment to "mercy." So, what kind of mercy are we talking about here? This kind of mercy is exemplified in the New Testament when Jesus dines with tax collectors and sinners, and in the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. God expected us people to be merciful and compassionate towards others, just as God is merciful towards us.

**To walk humbly with your God.** When interpreting this verse, some of us tend to focus on the meaning of the adverb "humbly." However, we should focus on the verb “to walk.” In Scripture, the metaphor of walking is commonly used to describe the overall direction of one's life that is on the path of the Lord or blameless in the Lord. For example, Psalm 119 says: “Blessed are

those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord!" The metaphor of walking portrays a life that is in harmony with God's presence and follows a path aligned with God's will. We hope that when we cultivate our walks with God, we gain the power and passion to justice and love mercy.

The elements of doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God are fundamental in our Dehonian charism and Sacred Heart spirituality. Fr. Dehon's writings, particularly his *Christian Social Manual*, stress the importance of acting with justice. In the *Christian Social Manual*, he wrote, "Justice is the foundation of social relationships, and its purpose is to ensure individual rights. These rights, whose violation is a crime of outrage against humanity, must be protected." In another writing, Fr. Dehon stated, "Nothing has a foundation without justice. Nothing endures except through justice."

Fr. Dehon's commitment to justice was rooted in his recognition of God's love and mercy. He saw the Sacred Heart as an embodiment of God's love for humanity. Fr. Dehon believed that the ultimate desire of every person is to be in complete union with God. He encouraged us to immerse ourselves in the love of the Sacred Heart, just as a fish swims in water. Because Fr. Dehon was immersed in the love of the Sacred Heart, he was willing to submit to God's will with confidence and complete *fiat* to God's goodness. He once noted that when we experience the grace of God, we should put it into practice and live it with faith, hope, and above all, love.

Doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God are not separate from each other; rather, they are interconnected. They form the essence of God's heart. Tom, I believe that having the words of the prophet Micah on your wall was not for decoration. Instead, they served as a reminder of what you wanted to achieve in your religious life as a Dehonian.

Perhaps you believed that by living according to these principles, you would be invited to the glorious banquet held on Mount Zion, as described in the first reading from Isaiah. Perhaps you believed that you would not be separated from the love of Christ, as proclaimed in the second reading from Romans. And perhaps you hoped that you would be blessed for living the Beatitudes, as promised in the gospel reading from Matthew.

Tom, may we too follow the footsteps of Fr Leo John Dehon and have your courage to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. We hope that we too one day will be invited to the glorious banquet held on Mount Zion, never be separated from God's love, and be blessed for living the Beatitudes.