



## EXPERIENCE THE PROFOUND GIFT OF GOD'S MERCY!

In *Sophie's Choice*, William Styron tells the story of a woman haunted by the horrors of Nazi Germany. She reveals her secrets, one by one, to the man who loves her. Her final secret is the tale of her choice: When forced by soldiers to choose which of her two children would live and which would die, she sacrificed her youngest, Eva, screaming, "Take the baby! Take my little girl!" The long-repressed memory of that moment proves to be one of Sophie's last as she succumbs to guilt and despair.

Each of our days is filled with a thousand choices. From getting out of bed at a certain time (or hitting the "snooze" once too often), to dressing, eating, traveling, and working, each action is a choice. Few days seem to offer choices as profound as that faced by Sophie in our story, or by the prodigal son in the Gospel, so we make them out of habit; we choose not to choose. But we are made in the image of God: Each of our choices can be profound.

**What we do is important.** Though we might express frustration some days that our work or lives seem unimportant, we are closer to the truth when we consider the terrifying opposite: Our actions can be profoundly significant; some can have eternal consequences. As Karol Wojtyla, Pope John Paul II, wrote in verse: "How deep are human deeds."

**What God does is more important.** Though obvious, this fact must be ingrained in our consciousness. We have the power to sin, and grievously, but God has the power to forgive. If we have squandered our heavenly inheritance with irresponsible living, if we have shunned mercy through self-righteousness, if we have been driven to terrible decisions, we can craft no sin superior to God's mercy. "[I]n our world, love is stronger than sin" (CCC, 2844).

**We are not in this alone.** Our goodness, or lack of goodness, is not simply a matter of certain words and actions. It is a function of our relationships—all of them. Our relationship with God. This is primary, of course. It is Christ who justifies us, who takes away the sins of the penitent. We must always strive to know God's will and to follow it as closely as possible. Our relationship with the church. We will make mistakes, both in judgment and action, and the church exists to guide us in our choices, to encourage us in our faith, and to extend forgiveness when we have fallen. The community of other Christians is essential to our life in Christ. Our relationships with one another. The prodigal son needed the forgiveness of his father, but also the acceptance of his brother. Likewise, the elder brother could not truly please his father until he welcomed his errant sibling home. We must extend the forgiveness we receive to all those who need it of us.

**The effect is profound and eternal.** When we work to heal a damaged relationship, we learn to forgive ourselves and one another. Though we will likely have to forgive more than once ("seventy times seven," as Peter would learn), we strengthen the relationship each time we work to overcome the flaws of the humans caught up in it. Through the communion of saints, we have the example and help of those who have gone before, and the opportunity to extend and receive forgiveness beyond the veil of death.

Our heavenly family is made up of those we see each day on earth. We can be good Christians by being good brothers and sisters to one another and dutiful sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. The Eucharist is an opportunity to share a meal with our heavenly family. With contrition for our own failings and mercy for those of others, let us greet our brother Christ in the divine banquet.

