

Dear

He was certain that his bomber plane was about to be blasted out of the sky due to the position of his enemy on that fateful day in the midst of World War II. But a stunning and unexpected act of mercy saved his and others' lives that day and provides a beautiful story to highlight the amazing Feast of Divine Mercy that we will celebrate the Sunday after Easter.

It was a typically cold, dreary winter day just 5 days before Christmas as 2nd Lieutenant Charles Brown climbed into his B17 for his first combat mission in World War II. They were only 30 miles from their bomb drop site when they began to take on fire from the enemy over and over again. The damage was crippling to the aircraft, and several of the crew were severely injured as Charles and his crew became the perfect, isolated target.

Brown and his crew found themselves with only one working gun out of the original eleven as they continued to be assaulted by fire from all sides. He looked out his cockpit window to see a German Messerschmitt 109 fighter plane only about a yard away from his wing. He realized his and the rest of his crew's end was certain, and they were as good as dead.

But what happened next was as remarkable and so unexpected. The German pilot, rather than opening fire and sending them all to a certain fiery death, turned and looked in Brown's direction, saluted and broke away in departure.

Understandably stunned by the action of the German pilot, Charles desperately turned the severely damaged plane to the direction of its airbase in England. Rather than crashing the plane into the sea as he feared he would have to do, he was able to navigate the plane over the sea, through the dark cloudy skies above the British coast and safely to a base.

The image of this strange and mysterious encounter with the enemy remained firmly embedded in Charles Brown's memory for decades. In 1986, he began a search for the anonymous pilot and four years later he was delighted to receive a letter from a gentleman named Franz Stigler who identified himself as the mystery German fighter pilot who had spared his life.

The two men met, and it was then that Charles learned Stigler, came from a vocally anti-Nazi family. Franz was Catholic and had spent time studying to be a

Priest before the war. He had not wanted to join the Fighter Corps and initially signed up only to train other pilots, but life took him another direction.

Franz explained that on that day of their encounter, he had already gunned down two bomber planes, and needed only one more that day to earn the coveted Knight's Cross award. He was aware that his decision to spare Brown's bomber aircraft was a court-martial offense in Nazi Germany, and if this secret were to be revealed it would likely have resulted in his execution.

Charles listened intently as Franz spoke, and clearly wanted to know the answer to the most pressing question, namely why then, despite all the risks, did Franz decide to spare him and his crew? Franz explained that at the moment of their encounter, he was fingering the Rosary in his pocket, and looking into Charles' terrified eyes he realized that he just couldn't gun down the severely crippled plane with the injured crew.

After the meeting, the two veterans became close friends, so much so that they came to refer to each other as "brothers" by the end of their lives. They remained friends until both men died in 2008. Charles never forgot Franz's heroic act of love and knew that he was alive because of an act of mercy.

God asks us to be merciful and to bring mercy into situations where it is absent. Mercy changes our attitude and actions. Mercy helps us to look at people differently. When we look at people with eyes of mercy it is about looking with compassion, with understanding, and with love. Mercy is about giving another chance.

Often times it is very hard to choose mercy over justice. The hurts in our lives can run very deep and it is easy to see others as simply enemies. Pain and betrayal brought on by a family member or close friends can leave deep wounds within our hearts. But it is when we are merciful towards them, that God's love can flow through us, allowing the opportunity for transformation.

Mercy is defined as, 'compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm.' Soon we will celebrate the Feast of Divine Mercy. Just as these two war enemies found, showing love and mercy is transformative, it also allows us to touch Divine Mercy.

Thank you so much for your ongoing prayers and support that enables the Guadalupe Radio Network to broadcast many Easter and Divine Mercy programs to the hearts and souls of even those just stopping by to eaves drop on the dial, not realizing what transforming message they might hear. May you and your loved ones have the blessing of peace and reconciliation during this time. A Novena of Masses will be celebrated for you each month this year and I ask that you keep us in your prayers.

Sincerely in Jesus and Mary,

Len Oswald
President