

Homily
April 7, 2024
2nd Sunday of Easter / Divine Mercy Sunday
16:10 – 27.35

Mercy. There are various forms of mercy. Today we celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday. And while we may think mercy is shown only in one form, which would be here or here, (pointing at the Confessional or the Reconciliation Room) there are many, many forms.

How often have you experienced the mercy of a friend, who would sit with you in crisis?
How often have you extended mercy to a person who is hungry - food, or a way to be fed?

When Pope John Paul II declared in 1999 that the Second Sunday of Easter from that point forward to be Divine Mercy Sunday, he did it with an eye to Mercy Flowing Through the Easter Season. The very act of the Resurrection is a part of God's mercy. It culminates. It capstones the gift of Jesus' Life, Death and Resurrection. So why not -- when we hear this Gospel, which we do every year on this Sunday, **focus** -- on God's mercy.

Now it's true, we could focus on Thomas. Some call him "the Doubter." Some "The Great Questioner," and some, just a stubborn man. We could.

But we're going to focus on mercy.

What's the first thing that the Lord offers the apostles, the disciples in the room? Peace. He says, "Peace be with you." He knows they're disturbed. He knows that they're wondering where he is. They've heard that the tomb is empty. Peter saw it. John saw it.

And I am sure they were rattled. Besides that, they're in a locked room. They're in fear. If our leader has been killed, what's next for us? And Jesus steps into their midst and says, "Peace be with you."

And then, to help them grasp the reality that he is the Risen One, he offers them his hands and his side. Having done that, what does he say to them? "Peace be with you." Can you imagine what was going on in their minds and in their hearts?

It says that they rejoiced, for they had seen the Lord. So, we know they were joy-filled, but I imagine they had a few questions, too. But it wasn't time for those. What it WAS time for was Pentecost. This is John's Gospel account of Pentecost.

What does Jesus do? **He breathes on them.** That is a profound symbol of the coming of the Spirit. And he says, “Whose sins you forgive are forgiven; whose sins you retain are retained.”

At that moment, he pours into them the Spirit of mercy and forgiveness. And in this Pentecost begins the process of carrying through the Church the forgiveness of sins in His name. Remember, it’s always in His name.

Now, we know the gift of God’s forgiveness is really very important to us. However, there is this Sacrament that we share, based from this moment, called “Reconciliation.” It’s also known as Penance and Confession, yes. Those are two actions. The Reconciliation is the result.

But we don’t like this Sacrament. How many here rush to the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Anybody? I only had one hand last night. But this individual visits once every two weeks. And I have known him since 1993 at the Cathedral. And even there, every two weeks.

This is the Sacrament we love to hate. But it is the touch of God’s mercy. Now this doesn’t mean that God’s mercy is confined to a room, is it? No. Because we know that God’s mercy includes His compassion, His understanding, His sending people into our lives, His presence when we are in crisis – all forms of mercy. But in this case, it’s the gift where we hear distinctly the Lord say through the minister and therefore, through the Church, “Your sins are forgiven.”

The Absolution Prayer that is given to the penitent after their Act of Contrition, goes like this. Listen to the words and then think of the Gospel.

*God the Father of mercies
Through the death and Resurrection of his Son
Has reconciled the world to himself
And poured out the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins.
Through the ministry of the Church
May God grant you pardon and peace.
And I absolve you of your sins
In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

The prayer is right out of the wonder of this Gospel passage. Pardon. Peace. Forgiveness. Through the Church, but always in Christ.

The Church is an instrument. The Confessor is an instrument. The priest only speaks “in persona Christe capitis.” In the person of Christ, who is the head. So, when we gather for this

sacrament, it is the Lord who speaks - not me, or any of my brothers. We're just an instrument and a steward of God's forgiveness.

Having so reflected on this Divine Mercy Sunday, perhaps we might find our way sooner than later to here (pointing toward the Confessional), or back there (pointing toward the Reconciliation Room), or in my office, or on the beach. Yes. I have heard Confessions on the beach. Hey, when you're asked, you're asked.

I have heard them at a youth conference in a vast room where the youth and their adults come and go for hours and hours. And at that same conference, I had the opportunity to be approached by a brother priest, who simply said, "Do you have time for a Confession?"

We were in the Exhibit Hall. So, I said, "Of course." We walked over to a concrete wall, both of us kind of facing the wall. He shared his need. I shared what the Lord would give him.

Now, the one thing about this sacrament is, we can't schedule it 24 hours a day. However, it is available, always. Always.

But it has to be person-to-person. It can't be on a teams meeting, or something like that. Or by the phone. It has to be person-to-person.

It's a gift!

Shall we receive the gift?

And then put it to good use. As a resurrection people.