

Homily

April 27, 2025

2nd Sunday of Easter / Divine Mercy Sunday

25:12 – 36:25

Garrison Keeler used to begin his Tales from Lake Woebegone with, “It’s been a quiet week here in Lake Woebegone...” That has not been true this last week for us, has it? It has been a very, very busy week. A week of loss – the sudden death of Francis. Although we knew he was sick. And then the unfolding of thousands and thousands of people across the world, but especially in Rome, at the Vatican, Saint Peter’s Basilica and outdoors. Coming to pay their respects to this man, who for 12 years, led us and all baptized Catholic Christians in faith.

If you’re curious like I am, you’ve probably read a thing or two on the internet or the newspaper, or whatever, about Francis and what he did. There are two things about Francis that have always stuck out for me. And they coincide very well with our readings today: **Mercy and Compassion.**

They drove him as a priest, as a member of the Jesuit Order, as an Auxiliary Bishop, a Bishop, an Archbishop, and Cardinal who became Pope.

We see an example of compassion in the First Reading. Now, sometimes we think of mercy and compassion as the same thing. Well, they’re related, but they’re not the same. “Compassion,” is connecting with another person empathy-wise. We empathize with their difficulties, their suffering. Then we try to help alleviate it. That’s compassion.

“Mercy,” is the act of compassion of forgiveness of another, even though it may not be merited, or equal to the sin. We’ll get back to the second one.

Compassion. These early believers brought their friends, their neighbors, and possibly strangers who were ill, on mats, or whatever. They brought them that the very shadow of Peter could fall upon them. And in the spirit of Jesus, they would be cured.

The Acts of the Apostles is the book that follows the Gospel of Luke. And it is basically the story of how Jesus works through the Early Church. This is a powerful example of it. How many times did Jesus encounter people who needed a cure? How many times did he respond to them – sometimes even before they asked. And how many times did Jesus say, “Your sins are forgiven?” Even before he healed.

He connected with them. He found in their suffering something that touched his heart. We hear in the Gospels, “He had pity,” “He had compassion for them.” And he tried to alleviate it in some way, shape or form. Physically, mentally, spiritually.

And in the Acts of the Apostles, we see the Church carry that on.

Yes! In the 21st Century, we are to be a people of compassion. To notice the suffering around us and in some way, help to alleviate it.

I love this passage from the Gospel of John. First of all, I think Thomas is a hoot. But more so...Jesus appears to the disciples, even though the doors are locked, for fear of the Jewish authorities. Why are they afraid? Because Jesus died. In part, because they (the leaders) turned Jesus over to the Romans.

But they’re also afraid because they are lost. They lost Jesus. They lost their leader, their teacher, their master. So in a sense of compassion, Jesus returns.

The Risen One enters the room. And what’s the first thing he says?

“Peace be with you.”

Not, “Hi, guys! I’m back.” No. He touches them. And with that which all good Jews would wish the other: “Shalom!” Shalom, peace be with you.

Having given them peace, he offers evidence that it’s really him. And then, Pentecost happens. No. No, wait a minute, Father. That’s in Jerusalem, later.

Well, in Luke’s Gospel account and in the Acts of the Apostles, yes. But here, he breathes on them, which is to say, the Spirit and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit! Whose sins you forgive are forgiven. Whose sins you retain are retained.”

This is the beginning, my brothers and sisters, of the Sacrament we love to hate. (Pointing at the Confessional) Or back there. (The Reconciliation Room)

The Lord makes the mission of the Church, forgiveness. As he did.

His mercy: it is undeserved. You can’t earn it. You can’t pay for it. You can’t barter for it. You can only say, “Please. I’m a sinner.”

Or as one of the shortest Acts of Contrition says, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” It’s that simple.

We are to be as a Church, a source of Mercy for sin. Let all know that it's a free gift. They only have to ask. And it is given, even though the punishment could be far more severe.

Hearken back to the steward who is about to be dismissed for dissipating the owner's property. And he's racked-up a huge debt. And he pleads with the owner, who is moved (are you ready?) with compassion and forgives the debt. –

Sadly, that one now forgiven goes out and throttles one of his fellow servants for a much smaller amount. He didn't get it. He didn't really receive the forgiveness. Why? Because it was really only about **him**.

Coming full circle.

For 12 years now, we have received a constant call for mercy. We've seen a Pope actually go to Confession. Do you remember that? That was a powerful moment. He's kneeling outside of this – kind of – room like that (the Confessional), in his papal garb. What he urged us to do, he did.

He was a man of compassion. Lampedusa, Lesbos, all the many places he went. Even our own border, on the Mexican side, where he celebrated Mass for immigrants.

Compassion.

The poor of Rome, who actually were the ones who helped receive his body yesterday at St. Mary Major.

He's not a saint. He would have said that, himself. We'll see what the Church does with that. We've had a few saints named in the last few years. We don't "make" them. We name them.

But, brothers and sisters, we know what our mission is, don't we?

Compassion and Mercy.

May we live what we've been shown and bring about the Kingdom in our midst.