Homily

April 24, 2022

2nd Sunday of Easter / Divine Mercy Sunday

27:28-39:52

On this Second Sunday of the Easter Season, also known as Divine Mercy Sunday, it is apt for us to recall the great gift we have been given in Christ: the mercy of our God revealed so profoundly. And I would like us to focus on the simplicity of the Cross. Not the Crucifix. The Crucifix is a wonderful representation to remind us of the “person” of Christ on the Cross. But just the Cross.

It’s a very simple piece, isn’t it? A vertical and a horizontal – you can draw it very quickly. You can etch it on the back of a medal. You can make it out of almost anything. But it’s more than what we make. It’s what it means. It is the **arrow** that points to the Resurrection and the reminder that the Resurrection is given over to us, along with the dying, in our baptism.

The first thing our parents do, and our godparents when we’re to be baptized, is to trace the vertical and the horizontal upon us. I bring this up because there is a depth to the meaning of this simple symbol. And today the readings expose a particular deep meaning – vertical and horizontal.

We’ll start with the vertical. Let’s look at that reading from Revelation. It’s the beginning of the Book of Revelation. It’s John’s vision - the beginning of it, on the island of Patmos. Patmos is a rocky crag with lots of green on it, but for him it was a place of exile. As he said, “I have preached and now I am paying the price.” And he lived in a cave. It’s way down deep. You have to go down one heck of a set of stairs to get there. And it’s not very big. And it’s dark. That’s where he lived.

That’s where he had a vertical encounter with the Lord. It was very personal, wasn’t it? The Lord spoke to him as with the voice of a trumpet. And then told him who he was and what he needed him to do. “Him,” being John. The Lord commissions – he sends him – to write, write down the vision. Why? So that it can be shared with the community of believers from which he came, who were under persecution, that they might have hope. But it started with John and the Lord, in the “I – Thou,” if you will. It’s very personal.

Now we see another personal encounter in the Gospel according to John today. And that is Jesus and Thomas. It’s a very particular personal moment when Jesus appears a second time and addresses Thomas’ doubt and draws him out to a great proclamation of faith. That too, was very personal. But interestingly, that event is set within the community. The horizontal.

The community of believers known as “the Eleven” (although in first part of the Gospel, it is only 10, because Thomas is out doing something else.) And when the Lord encounters this community of believers, he wishes them the most important thing he could give them, because they’re gathered there in fear. He wishes them ***peace***. “Peace be with you.” Then he says it again. And then he commissions them. He sends them forth with the power of the forgiveness of sins. It’s a ***communal moment***. It’s the brothers gathered who are called to share.

You know, the very prayer we have, the Absolution Prayer at the Sacrament of Penance, – Reconciliation, Confession… whichever name you want to give it, finds its roots in this Gospel passage. Listen to it for a moment. It’s very apt on this Divine Mercy Sunday to recall it. Listen.

“God the Father of mercies through the death and resurrection of his Son, has sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins.” Remember? He “***breathed***” on them? (and now I have lost the track because I threw something in the middle of it.) “Through the ministry of the Church, may God grant you pardon and peace.” And “I,” that is, “**Jesus**,” (in the person of the priest) “absolve you of your sins. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Making the Sign of the Cross) The powerful encapsulation of this moment in the Gospel, which we can share in.

But there’s another communal moment in our readings in the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 5. It’s the third such recounting of the early Jerusalem faith community, who were rooted in those same apostles in the Gospel. First, in Chapter 2, we hear of how they get along really well together, and they are in prayer a lot together. In the second, we hear of their sharing things in common, including property, so that nobody goes without. And then in this one, they share in the power of the care of the merciful God with physical healing – signs and wonders. They are the community of believers. They are an example of the “horizontal.”

Now, let’s go back to that stick figure, the vertical line and the horizontal line. They intersect, don’t they? To make the whole. And that intersection, my brothers and sisters, is where each of us stands: on our own and together. On our own because we each have a call in our baptism to have a personal relationship with the Lord. And we do that through our prayer, through our reading, through our seeking the Spirit to help us to make connections, to help us to understand. And then to help us to go out living that understanding in the faith.

But there’s more. Because when we stand there, we’re not alone, are we? There’s a whole mess of us, all baptized, all with that same vertical relationship, invitation and reality. And yet together, we are the Body of Christ. We are the bringers of that very mercy that we celebrate today. Yes. Rooted in God the Father, Son and Spirit, but sent through the Church.

So I would invite us, if you don’t have a Cross at home, make one. Draw it on a piece of paper. Maybe some of you could actually…(What’s that kind of printing where you make things? Pardon? 3D? Was that you, Bob? Oh. That’s YOU, Bob. Okay.) Or just go out in the yard and find two twigs that got blown down in the last day or so, and bind them together. Hold it to remind you, not only of this Sunday when we recall God’s mercy, but of your personal relationship with the Lord and make a commitment to work on that relationship this week.

But more so, gaze upon the horizontal bar and how you stand in the middle, but as it reaches out, you are gathered to the community of faith and they, to you. And perhaps recall those closest to you in the community of faith who reveal the very mercy of God.

It’s such a simple two lines, but so powerful – shot through with meaning that is **salvific**.

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