

2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER 2015, Cycle B: Sunday of Divine Mercy

Acts of Apostles 4: 32-35 + Psalm 118 + 1 John 5: 1-6 + John 20: 19-31

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: April 12, 2015

After 24 years of preaching on this Gospel,
something new is beginning to dawn on me.
For so many years I have focused my thoughts and attention on Thomas.
I have imagined reasons for his absence.
I would wonder why he was not there when Jesus appeared the first time.
As we discussed this Gospel at this past Thursday's Pastoral Council meeting,
I was defending Thomas from what I thought was a "*bum rap*",
his being forever known as "Doubting Thomas," when in reality
he makes the most powerful profession of faith in John's Gospel.

What I have finally begun to realize is that this Gospel is not about Thomas at all.
It is about **Jesus Christ risen** among his people.
Thomas is not the point of the story. Jesus is the point of the story.
It is the behavior and the words of Jesus that matters most of all.
Whatever happened with Thomas being absent and then showing up the next week
makes way for yet another appearance of the Risen Jesus
and the experience in his presence of even more peace and joy for his disciples.

We must pay attention to Jesus in this story.
He comes to his disciples when they are afraid.
The Gospel writer says they had the doors locked "**for fear of the Jews.**"
These first followers of Jesus had reason to be fearful,
for their leader had been tortured and then killed in a horrific manner on the cross.
Surely the authorities would come looking for them next.
Fear fills that upper room. Then the level of fear rises when they see the Risen Jesus,
for now they are afraid he has come back to haunt them as a ghost.
Who else but a ghost could pass through locked doors?
The nightmares haunting their nights are now darkening their days, too.
Even as he calms their fears by showing them his hands and side,
proving that he indeed is the Crucified One come back to life, the disciples surely still are
afraid in yet another way---surely he has come back to punish them for abandoning him.

But does the Jesus chide them for their cowardly behavior?
Does he scold them? Does he look at Peter and say: "I told you so."
None of that. He simply says: "Peace."
He simply says: "Peace." Everything is fine. He knows them. He loves them.
He called them his own. He embraces their weakness and their failure.

He knows all their doubts and their fears,
and he simply comes to be among them bringing them peace.
Even their absence at his time of greatest need will not prevent his life-giving presence
to them in their time of greatest need. He brings peace and fear flees.

It is a moment of Divine Mercy.

It is a message of hope to a church that he has not left them,
and that when his presence is acknowledged, they will know peace and the joy it brings.
To imperfect and broken people Jesus entrusts his final and best gift, peace.
He describes that gift in terms of **merciful forgiveness**.
It is never earned nor deserved.
If it were, it would not be “mercy.”
What he asks of them in those words of sending is mercy.
What they receive from him they must give.

The power to show mercy comes from being a broken person.
The power to show mercy comes from the knowledge and the feeling in your heart
that you **owe everything you are and have to sheer divine mercy**.
That is exactly what was going on in that upper room.

They had come to the realization that they deserved nothing.
They were helpless and hopeless.
They were cowards and unfaithful, and in that truth they were able to say and accept
the fact that every joy and virtue and every success they knew
came from the free and undeserved mercy of God.

It is the same message of mercy repeated to St. Mary Faustina some 1900 years later.
We can almost picture the Risen Christ shaking his head after 1900 years and saying,
“My followers have still not got the point! Let me try it again.”
So he says to his faithful servant Faustina,
*“Every soul who believes and trusts in my mercy **will have it.**”*

On this Divine Mercy Sunday, we hear the great truth of God’s merciful love yet again,
and we realize with all the disciples who have gone before us--Peter and Thomas and
Mary Magdalene and Faustina and all the rest—
that God’s mercy is a gift God is wanting us to receive through his Risen Son.
It is ours for the receiving---no mighty acts of faith or great deeds of love necessary—
simply open up our hearts with Thomas and all the rest—
and receive it in order to give away.

Sunday after Sunday the Risen Jesus comes back for us, for he wants us to believe.
Our weaknesses and failures, even our unfaithfulness cannot keep Him away.
He comes yet again to calm our fears and gift us with the blessing of His Peace.
Every Sunday is a celebration of the Resurrection.

The Risen Jesus, mercifully forgiving us his disciples again and again,
keeps reminding us that God's love will always win, that Love is stronger than Death!
This is the mystery that we now stake our life—and our death—on:
Nothing dies forever, and all that has died in love will be reborn in an even larger love.

This knowledge about the resurrection, this belief in the Risen Lord Jesus,
causes peace to flow through us like a river and create the world anew.
Our encounter with the Lord of Mercy here, sharing his life with us, strengthens us
to transform the world by sharing the gift of merciful love we have received.