

2nd Sunday in Easter (Divine Mercy) + 27 April 2025 + Jn 20:19-31

Ever since the year 2000, this 2nd Sunday in the Octave of Easter has been known as Divine Mercy Sunday. To be honest, for a long time I found it a little strange that we had just focused the whole 40 days of Lent on our sins and God's mercy, and just when we start to celebrate the joy of the Resurrection, here we are again: sin and mercy. But if we listen carefully to today's Gospel, we see just how connected mercy is to the Resurrection.

So to set the stage, today's Gospel is the 2nd appearance of Jesus after His resurrection. He first appears to Mary Magdalene in the garden. She shares this incredible news with the disciples, but according to the other evangelists, the disciples didn't yet believe. So now the disciples are gathered together, still fearful, and probably quite perplexed, at all that has just happened. And then, although the door was locked—that is no small detail—Jesus appears in their midst! They were probably terrified, and so Jesus immediately comforts them: *peace be with you!* This was the same message that He gave them at the Last Supper, when He says: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you...Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid (Jn 14:27)*. Although at *that* moment, they did not yet comprehend the importance of the Lord's words, as they did not realize what was about to come.

In fact, this was the same message that the angels sang to the shepherds at the Lord's birth: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of goodwill (Lk 2:14)*. In this way, we see that the incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ remained, as it were, under the loving gaze of the Father; that is, always under His *peace*. And at this point, the disciples must have really needed to hear that, because Jesus once again says *Peace be with you!* But this time He adds, *As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*

So what's that all about? Well, that's the story that we will hear play out in the Acts of the Apostles—our 1st readings at Mass during the Easter Season. Jesus has accomplished all of the Father's work for Him on earth, and soon He is going to return to the Father. But that doesn't mean He is going to leave the world all alone. His mission is now passing on to His disciples. In fact, they are about to "graduate" from being *disciples, or students, to apostles*: meaning, those *sent forth* on mission. And what is their mission? Jesus tells them: *Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.*

And this brings us back to divine mercy. As we said before, there is a direct connection between the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and the forgiveness of sins. To understand that connection, we must again go back to Jesus' farewell message to His disciples at the Last Supper, on the eve of His passion. In John 16, Jesus tells the disciples that it is better that He goes away from them. Why? *If I do not go, He says, the Advocate (the Holy Spirit) will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes he will convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and condemnation (16:7-8).*

In other words, Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension had to happen before the Holy Spirit could come and be poured out on the disciples. But when the Spirit comes, Jesus says, He will *convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and condemnation*. Now that doesn't sound like very good news, does it? Well, that's why Jesus' commissioning of the disciples here includes such a wonderful new addition: the Spirit will also open the door to the *forgiveness of sins*, to divine mercy, through the Apostles and their successors.

The Good News of the Gospel is not only that Jesus has risen from the dead. That is indeed wonderful! But the proper *response* to that good news, according to the Lord Himself, is repentance. Now, we might say, "but I tell God I'm sorry for my sins, I go to confession, I try to be a good person, what more am I supposed to do?" Well, our English word "repentance" comes from a Greek word "metanoia," which doesn't just mean "say I'm sorry." It literally means "to turn back," as in, turn away from sin and turn back to God. It is con-version—turning around, a radical reorientation of one's life from myself to God. It's not just a mechanical transaction, it is restoration of relationship, and all that comes with that.

So, seen in this deeper vision, divine mercy then, is not just God saying "I forgive you." Rather, it is God's fidelity to His Covenant with us, it is His compassion for us, *and* it is His forgiveness of our sins. On the 4th Sunday of Lent, we heard the parable of the prodigal son and father. I said at that time that this parable gives us perhaps the best image of the relationship between God the Father and we as His children in all the Gospels. Because we see on full display in this parable what the Father's mercy for us really means. That is, His fidelity to the covenant. The Father never disowns his son, even though the son disowns the father. And the father's compassion for the son's sin-induced misery—he throws away all social conventions of that time, runs out to his son, embraces him and kisses him. And finally, his forgiveness: he puts robe on his son and a ring on his finger—all signs of restored dignity, restored sonship.

Why was the father so prodigious in his mercy? Well, simply because the son repented, "turned around" and re-oriented himself to the father, the father immediately showed him mercy, and covenant relationship was restored. As the father explained to the older son, *we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again* (cf. Lk 15:32). Repentance and mercy led to a kind of resurrection. So John concludes our Gospel with his thesis statement: *these [things] are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name*. True belief is manifested in repentance, which moves God to mercy. The ultimate effect of mercy, then, is new life, is resurrection from the dead. This is all a work of the Holy Spirit; the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. And this is why Jesus was so eager to send the Holy Spirit: He wanted to share His resurrection with everyone! All they had to do was repent and believe in order to experience new life: both now and forever.