

Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday. This celebration always falls on the 2nd Sunday of Easter, as the gift of Divine Mercy is indeed the Easter gift. That is to say, the value of the resurrection for us sinners is that it is rooted in God's Divine Mercy. This is something that is easy for us who have heard the story of the resurrection to take for granted. We know what the resurrection is all about. We understand that it is the means through which Christ conquered the power of sin. But that notion was not immediately apparent to the apostles at the moment of the resurrection.

In the Gospel we read that the Jesus' disciples had locked themselves in a room, out of fear. What a great image for sinners, huh? Isn't that exactly what sin causes us to do, to lock ourselves in a room all by ourselves? Doesn't sin often lead us to fear – fear that others might find out, fear that we have separated ourselves from God. So here we have the disciples of Jesus, the locked in this room. Not only that, but they are locked in the upper room. Again, the great imagery used by St. John the Evangelist. They are in an upper room, removed from the rest of the world. Distanced from others. Again, isn't this what we do when we sin. We lock ourselves in a room and hold others at a distance from ourselves.

Then what happens. Jesus comes and stands in their midst. The locked doors, the distancing, none of that could keep Jesus out. When it comes to God, there is no hiding. There's nowhere we can go to isolate ourselves from God. He can reach us anywhere he wants. This is both scary and comforting. It's scary, because, let's face it, we don't want God to show up in the middle of our sin anymore than a child wants his parents to show up when sneaking a cookie from the cookie jar. It's unnerving to have Jesus show up in the middle of our sinfulness. When he shows up, he has a tendency to do things like show us his scars. When he appeared to the disciples, St. John tells us that He showed His scars – He's showing the disciples their sin and its consequences. Recall, the last time they saw him, they denied him, they abandoned him. Now He comes before them, bringing them face to face with their sin. He shows them the very real consequences of their sin. And then he speaks.

"Peace be with you." Suddenly this terrifying experience is transformed. It ceases to be scary and becomes comforting. As the disciples see the very real consequences of sin, the wounds of Christ, they also experience his comfort, his divine mercy. Jesus had every right to shown them divine wrath. He easily could have lectured them, and punished them for turning on Him despite His warnings. But no, he comes and says, "Peace be with you," as he shows them his wounds. What a powerful image this is. He's doesn't ignore the wounds. He doesn't pretend they aren't real. He shows them, and yet a the same time, gives his message of peace. He offers forgiveness.

Divine Mercy is at the very core of our faith. It allows us to acknowledge that we're not just sinners, we're forgiven sinners. God's Divine Mercy trumps any sin we commit. We killed God, and God responded with Divine Mercy. This is our faith. This is what salvation is all about – the peace of God that we experience through the forgiveness of sins. This is what we as Catholic Christians profess to the world.

And not only do we profess that Jesus forgave the sins of those who killed Him, but we also profess that Jesus' Divine Mercy is still being spread to sinners throughout the world. That is our Mission as a Church. We exist for the salvation of souls. We exist to bring the entire world into the embrace of God's Divine Love, and we do this by spreading His Divine Mercy.

Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on the disciples, the early Church, and gave the Church the power to forgive sins. The Church points to this as the institution of the Sacrament of Penance. The Church's claim to be able to mediate the forgive sins is rooted in this very event. We see this dramatic event of bringing people into the peace and love of God in the prayer of absolution. The priest says, "God the Father of Mercies. . . has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins. Through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace." It is through the Church that sins are forgiven, and people are truly able to experience the Peace of Christ, that gift of salvation after which our parish is named.

But then we hear an alarming fact. Thomas was not there, he was absent. Not good. Why is this a bad sign? Because Jesus is present in the Church. The Gospels tell us this, Vatican II tells us this. The Church is the body of Christ. Christ is present when the Church is assembled in community. So it's not a good thing to be absent from the Church. Thomas' problem was that he wasn't with the community. He was off somewhere else, on his own. So he didn't see the Lord, and he was unable to experience God's Divine Mercy.

When the disciples told him what happened, Thomas professed his unbelief. We see this a lot today, don't we. You don't have to look very far to find someone professing their unbelief, especially at the Church. Just think how many of the truth's taught by the Catholic Church are met with skepticism and dissent. I think this makes Thomas an appealing figure to many people today, as our science-oriented society has created a lot of skepticism. We want proof. We want to touch the wounds, and until we do we won't believe.

So Jesus appears to Thomas, and shows His wounds to Thomas. In one of the most emotionally moving passages in the Gospels, Jesus says to Thomas, go ahead, touch my wounds. Are you skeptical? Touch my hands. Come here, take your hand and put it in my side. Don't persist in your unbelief. Well, what happens next? This man who was skeptical when he was away from the Church, suddenly makes the greatest proclamation of faith found anywhere in Scripture, "My Lord and My God." And make no doubt about it, this was an act of faith, not evidence. He couldn't touch the divinity of Christ, he couldn't feel that. No, his experience of the Divine Mercy, the experience of touching the wounds of Christ, of touching the effects of sin, examining the consequences of sin, and experiencing the subsequent forgiveness offered by Christ are what led him to that great proclamation of faith.

The Gospel and the celebration of Divine Mercy beckons us to explore the wounds of Christ, the consequences of sin, not in the hopes of creating guilt, but so that we may experience the Divine Mercy as fully and powerfully as Thomas did, so that we too, can join Thomas in professing our faith by saying, "My Lord and my God."

Peace to you, and to all who experience the Divine Mercy.