

2nd Sun. of Easter/Divine Mercy- Sun. April 19, 2020

Last Sunday -- Easter Sunday -- we celebrated the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This Sunday and during the 50 days of this Easter season we will be looking, as Peter does in today's second reading, at what this new birth we have received through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead means for us.

If we want to better understand what we as the community of the church have received through our baptism and where we as a church are headed in the future it would good to look to our roots that we find in today's scriptures.

Today's first reading is a bit idealized, but its point is to show us that in Christ, who has been raised up to God, the lives of his followers are also raised above their previous way of life. Just as for the early church, being Catholic involves seeking to grow in faith, caring about one another, participation in the Eucharist and taking time to pray.

Just as when we tell the stories of our own families, the first stories we tell of the early church are of the successes of the "good old days." As we go on, other stories we share often tell of suffering and adversity and how early believers persevered in the face of oppression and persecution.

This latter type of stories is what we have in today's Gospel and in today's second reading where St. Peter tells us to rejoice in the gift of our an imperishable inheritance in heaven "although now for a little while, he says, we may have to suffer through various trials.

On Easter Sunday we celebrated that not even death could keep our Lord from us. In today's Gospel it is fear that stands between the disciples and the Lord. We hear that the disciples were gathered together in a room with locked doors for fear of the Jews. Even though they had discovered or been told of the empty tomb, they were still overwhelmed and confused by the death of Jesus and they were fearful that what had happened to him might also happen to them.

The doors locked in fear cannot keep Jesus out, and he suddenly stands in their midst. His first words to these who had deserted him during his passion are surprising. He does not scold or reproach them. He says to them, "Peace be with you." Then he shows them the wounds in his hands and his side. Perhaps this is to clearly identify himself to them. Thomas even says that he will not believe that Christ is risen unless he touches these wounds.

But why does Jesus body still have these wounds? We might have expected that the resurrection would have forever healed the wounds of Good Friday. Instead, these wounds remain as permanent sign that the love of God is greater than all sin and death.

It is not only the presence of the risen Christ that takes away their fear and gives them peace, it is also the presence of these wounds that reassures disciples of his victory – that he has overcome the world – and will give them courage to act.

The peace of Jesus does not promise to eliminate the Cross in the life of his followers or in the history of the world – but, it makes us sure of his victory. To the gift of peace Jesus adds the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who will keep in our minds the witness of Jesus and defend the memory of Jesus in our hearts as we face doubts, scandals, discouragement and even hostility in our ministry. It is the Spirit within us who will give us the certainty and the strength to bring God's forgiveness into the world.

The Gospel says that once again Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you." Then he entrusts his disciples with a new mission: "As the father has sent me so I send you." Freed from fear, the disciples are now called to bring his peace to others, specifically through the forgiveness of sins,

In these days of great concern for the pandemic that continues bring fear and pain and death around our world it can be difficult sustain the joy of Easter. We worry about what is yet to come. What will the future of our humanity be like? We really do not know.

Humanly speaking we have some signs of light at the end of the tunnel as progress is being made on vaccines and treatments for those affected. Unfortunately, there are painful experiences that are yet to come. But, on this Sunday of Divine Mercy we have light of divine compassion to light our path ahead. However, this light is not just to help us see that Christ in his merciful compassion is with us in our trials. We also need to see that he himself is the victim of the sins and evil of our day and the one who overcomes them with the gift of himself on the cross to restore us to the joy of God's love and of community.

Instead of asking why all these things are happening in world, we would do better to ask what is God asking of me in this present moment and on this Divine Mercy Sunday? What we learn from St. Faustina and the devotion to Divine Mercy is that God wants greater trust from us. He wants us to trust in his divine mercy, his providential plan for us and to trust in his unfailing goodness in the face of our sufferings. (One spiritual writer recommends that we simply find an open church or on-line adoration site and sit in his presence and tell him all that is troubling us or overwhelming us.) He wants us to persevere in prayer, and it seems he would be asking us to discover new and creative ways of practicing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy as we see happening in the world today. Like Thomas, we must not be afraid to touch the wounds of Christ in others.. It is through touching and sharing in the wounds of others that we will understand the power of the cross and how life comes through the cross.

Likewise, we must not be afraid to look at and touch the wounds of our own sins. Many have fallen away from the sacrament of reconciliation. Today's feast of God's mercy and our Gospel offer us the opportunity to remember that the power to forgive sins was an Easter gift of Jesus to the Church. We need to see reconciliation as a privilege more than an obligation and see this sacrament as a treasure. – These times we are in, the Easter season, and today's feast of Divine Mercy are great gifts and opportunities to grow in our faith and our relationship with God and with each other. May God give us the grace to see and receive and use these gifts.