

## *2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter – Divine Mercy Sunday*

### *St. Patrick - Milford*

This year marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first universal celebration of that 1<sup>st</sup> Divine Mercy Sunday authorized by Pope St. John Paul II in 2001. “*Divine Mercy!*” he exclaimed that morning in St. Peter’s Square, “*Divine Mercy is the Easter gift that the Church receives from the risen Christ and offers to humanity at the dawn of the third millennium*”.

For the last 2 decades, we have come to experience the Octave ... the Eight Days of Easter Sunday and this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter—as the day particularly well-suited to the solemn celebration of gift of divine mercy. For, as St. John Paul II declared, divine mercy is *truly an Easter gift to the Church*. What happens on that very 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of Jesus with his disciples after he rose from the dead? He visits them what are his first words to them? “*Peace be with you,*” he says ... twice. And then? “*As the Father has sent me, so I send you. When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.*”

St John Paul II could say that divine mercy is an Easter gift because the risen Christ’s first concrete action is to establish the holy Sacrament of Mercy – the Sacrament of Penance. Christ gives to his disciples the power to forgive sins. This first gift of Easter is itself an act of mercy. Let us always remember, it is to Christ that we confess our sins, and it is from Christ that we receive mercy and pardon.

On every Divine Mercy Sunday, the gospel account of Thomas’ personal encounter with Christ is remembered. Recall that Thomas was absent when Jesus first appeared to the apostles, and he refused to believe their report of this visit. But the following week, when Christ again appears to the disciples, he speaks directly to Thomas: “*‘Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.’* Thomas answered and said to him, *‘My Lord and my God!’*” As Christ meets Thomas’s unbelief head-on by presenting himself to him in person, so he wants to encounter us directly when we seek his mercy.

Pope St. John Paul wrote that in “*the practice of individual confession, with a personal act of sorrow and the intention to amend and make satisfaction, the Church is...defending...man’s right to a more personal encounter with the crucified forgiving Christ.*” Just as Christ desires to address Thomas’s unbelief directly to bestow upon him the gift of faith, so he desires to meet us to grant the great gift of his forgiveness and mercy in the Sacrament of Penance. Sometimes, though, rather than seek out the grace of the Sacrament of Mercy, we may prefer to remain behind locked doors. As Pope Francis said in an Ash Wednesday sermon: “*There may be a few obstacles, which close the door of the heart. There is the temptation to lock the doors, or to live with our sin, minimizing it, always justifying it, thinking we are no worse than others; this, however, is how the locks of the soul are closed and we remain shut inside, prisoners of evil. Another obstacle is the shame of opening the secret door of the heart ... There is a third pitfall, that of distancing ourselves from the door: it happens when we hide in our misery, when we ruminate constantly, connecting it to negative things, until sinking into the darkest places of the soul*”.

But locked doors do not restrict Christ’s entry into our hearts. “*Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, ‘Peace be with you.’*” To quote Pope Francis again: “*The Lord’s grace alone frees us. Therefore, let us be reconciled, let us listen to Jesus who says to those who are weary and oppressed: ‘Come to me’. Not to dwell within themselves, but to go to him!*”

Brothers and Sister, Easter has once again brought us Comfort and peace. And today is a great day for us to repeat Thomas' confession of faith when we receive His today: "*My Lord and my God!*" The Sacrament of Divine Mercy—won for us by the passion, death and resurrection of Christ that we are celebrating in this Easter Season—is the concrete expression of God's merciful forgiveness of our sins and the sins of the whole world. We must resolve to take advantage of the great Mercy of our Risen Lord, and, in the closing words of every confession: "*Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endures forever.*" Amen.