

Fr. Ed  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter/Divine Mercy Sunday 2020  
Homily/Reflection

The Second Sunday of Easter is referred to as Divine Mercy Sunday, was instituted as a feast in the Church by St. John Paul 2<sup>nd</sup> the Great on May 5, 2000 just five days after the canonization of St. Faustina Kowalska, (2 good pierogis!). For some this feast might seem a bit oddly placed in the Easter Season. It would almost seem more reasonable to celebrate God's mercy during Lent when the focus is on conversion and forgiveness of sins. For a person of my generation, there is great familiarity with praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet and celebrating Divine Mercy very much like the Rosary for previous generations. So, to celebrate God's Divine Mercy is quite a normal thing for me and my contemporaries. In the end though, this is a perfect time to celebrate Divine Mercy, we need it now more than ever, not only in these current times but also in this time during the Church year.

The Feast of Divine Mercy expounds on the peace and mercy that Jesus extends to the Apostles when He encounters them locked inside the Upper Room in fear. We see the risen Jesus come through the locked doors of fear and concern. This reminds us that God's mercy pursues us! No matter where we are or where we try to hide away, God's mercy is always seeking us out! Further, we need to be reminded of God's mercy now more than ever because we have stepped away from the Lenten things that drew us to conversion and held us more accountable like prayer, fasting, and alms giving. As it pertains to the coronavirus pandemic, it was easier to endure in Lent when we were more focused and could incorporate the inconveniences of our times as another sacrifice. Now we are in a season of joy, but at the same time, we cannot forget the practices we engaged to bring us to this joy. So, God's mercy, we recall is always there and continues to pursue us.

We further need this mercy reminder because with the coronavirus we are living in what I'd call, Thomas Times. I say Thomas Times because of the way Thomas responded to the circumstances around him. Who knows what Thomas was thinking when the Apostles told him that Jesus has risen and that they had seen Him. We know Thomas did not believe them but perhaps he thought they were joking or trying to trick him. Maybe it was just easier for Thomas to live in the moment and to live by what he knew. Like us, in our time now, the times right after Jesus' resurrection were uncertain. When there is uncertainty, no matter how joyful the message, sometimes it's easier to stay put and hunker down with what we know.

The true test or practice of faith comes not when things are easy but rather, when we have to trust, to cast our nets out into the deep, especially when much is unknown. In these types of circumstances, we are called to choose faith over fear. Again, this is hard because it is far easier to cling to what we know verses taking the plunge. As Jesus came to visit again and encounter a doubting Thomas, He encounters us and His mercy continues to pursue us. So, whatever challenges may have come up for you during this sheltering in place, know the mercy of God comes for you.

Another reason we need the Feast of Divine Mercy now is Confession. Growing up as a youngster, this was my least favorite sacrament or aspect of our faith. Since then, my journey with Confession has been a transformative one which has enabled me to see the treasure of God's mercy and truly love this sacrament. However, for all of us, myself included, Satan tries to

play with us and God's forgiveness given to us in this sacrament. The Devil likes to kick around questions in our heads like: can I change? Can I become a better person? What happens if I fall again? Well, we again look to this feast which tells us that we are loved and that that pursuing mercy of God is always there to pick us up and put us back together. Also, God's mercy is there to remind us that when negatives thoughts of the past are intruding on our joy, that those sins are in the past, we learn from them and we live in the joy of God's love now.

What affirms all of this is what we hear in the Second Reading this weekend from 1 Peter 1:3-9 in which it says that God's great mercy is new birth to a living hope. The living hope is that we are loved. The living hope is because of God's mercy we become a new creation. The living hope is that we can change. The living hope is that Jesus' mercy and peace seeks us out and has the power to go through the locked doors of our hearts and souls.

What can we do with the great Divine Mercy of God that pursues us? There are several things to incorporate or put into practice.

Opportunity. You have heard me say a number of times already that we need to seek opportunity. In these coronavirus times it's easy to dwell on what is not. However, during this time it can be one of Holy Interruption where we can grow in new insights, opportunities, and things that perhaps God is encouraging us to focus on.

Another thing to do is to press in the mystery of the Risen One. Rather than running away, with the news of an empty tomb, Peter and the other Disciple run to the tomb. They leaned into the mystery of Christ rising from the dead. Thomas exclaimed, "my Lord and my God," in this he did not choose fear over the revelation of something new but approached the Lord then in faith. We too can choose our faith over fear, and trust that no matter where we are in a month or two or three or beyond, that God's mercy is there leading us.

When we trust God's mercy we are made new. The Gospel this weekend says that it was again the first day of the week when Jesus appeared to the fearful disciples in the Upper Room. Again, we heard in other Gospel accounts Jesus rose on the First Day of the Week and in Genesis, on the first day, God began to create. In God's mercy we are made a new creation.

Lastly, take a page from the Acts of the Apostles. Acts follows the early Church and we hear this weekend that they engaged in Teaching, Communal Life, Breaking the Bread (Mass), and Prayer. To engage God's Divine Mercy, take time in the teaching aspect to learn something new about your faith. You can read The Bible, do religious reading, or check out the great resources on [formed.org](http://formed.org). In Communal Life take time to deepen relationships with family or if you live alone, get on the phone. Invest in the relationships in your life one way or another. Perhaps nothing has brought the reality that we've been made for relationship than social distancing has. In Breaking Bread, be sure to watch Mass online or on TV and to reflect upon the readings for Mass. Saving the best for last, prayer. Continue to pray unceasingly, and if you are having a trouble encountering God's mercy, let that be the first thing you tell the Lord and let the Holy Spirit take it from there.

Happy Divine Mercy Sunday!