



THE FOCUS FOR THIS DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY IS:

Believe in the Risen Christ's Divine Mercy!

In today's Gospel, an incredulous apostle, Thomas, tells his brothers that he will not believe their claims that Christ is alive unless I see the nail marks in His hands and my finger into His side. So, what happened to the apostle Thomas?

However, after encountering the Risen Christ, Thomas utters five words: "My Lord and my God." These profound words convey Thomas' deepest belief in Christ's victory over death and in Christ's divinity. These five words are the highest tribute of Christology in ALL of the New Testament.

Do you remember these words of the chief apostle, Peter, who uttered: "I believe Lord; help my unbelief." Saint Theresa of Calcutta uttered these similar words daily when she prayed, "Increase my faith, Lord, and help me to pray!" Thus, the apostle Thomas did transition from doubting Jesus' resurrection to professing his faith in Jesus and declaring Jesus' divinity, "My Lord and my God."

What happened? Thomas encountered the love of Jesus, the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Now, when Thomas sees and touches the wound in Christ's side, he is overwhelmed because he sees Jesus' pierced side and actually beholds a wounded heart (recall now in John 19:34 when the soldier pierced Jesus' side on the cross that blood and water flowed out). The physical wound which Thomas saw was the gateway to the love and mercy of Jesus' Sacred Heart! What Thomas really envisioned was the love of Jesus' Sacred Heart for himself.

In other words, Thomas sees the pain in Jesus' Heart caused by man's ingratitude, apathy, and disbelief. Thomas sees Divine Mercy in physical form. What Divine Mercy does is that it takes our sins upon its own heart instead of inflicting upon humanity the just punishment for sin. Divine Mercy forgives, it heals, and it restores us to Grace.

Moreover, Jesus invites Thomas to "bring your hand and put it into my side," (John 20:27). The apostle Thomas is invited, as it were, to touch the Sacred Heart of Jesus. When Thomas encounters the Sacred Heart of Jesus, he is forgiven, he is healed, and he is restored. Thomas' heart is also changed into a heart of pure love. Therefore, he can only respond, "My Lord and my God."

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI says so profoundly in his encyclical, *Behold The Pierced One*, that: "our devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the very center and summit of our Easter celebration, and that the image of Christ's heart is the central theme of our Easter joy!"

In recent years since the canonization of St. Faustina of Poland as the apostle of Divine Mercy in 2000, our late Holy Father St. John Paul II has declared that this second Sunday of Easter is to be celebrated as Divine Mercy Sunday. St. Faustina has envisioned the image of Divine Mercy with blood and water flowing from Christ's heart which we especially venerate today. The Divine Mercy of the Sacred Heart of Jesus really translates to the very outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles to forgive sins, to change humans hearts to be more like the heart of Jesus Himself.

Christ's Sacred, Divine Heart of Mercy which transformed the apostle Thomas from despair to deep faith is ready to raise up each one of us: "Bring your hand and put it into my side," (John 20:27). Christ, thus invites each one of us to touch His Sacred Heart to allow our hearts to become beating hearts of agape (unconditional love of God).

Furthermore, as we look at Christ's Sacred and Merciful Heart, we can see that Christ's love and mercy forgives our unbelief, heals our broken hearts, and again restores us to sanctifying grace. More significantly, the physical wound in Christ's side is only the gateway to the love of Jesus' Sacred Heart. In Christ's Sacred and Merciful Heart, we can now see the love of Jesus for us and we can only truly respond, "My Lord and My God," (John 20:28).

In the words of St. Faustina, “I want to be completely transformed into your Mercy and to be your living reflection. O Lord, I trust in Thee...(1) help me O Lord to make my eyes to be more merciful so that I may never suspect or judge by appearances but look for what is beautiful in my neighbor’s soul, (2) that my ears may be merciful, so that I may give heed to my neighbor’s needs and not be indifferent to their plans and moaning, (3) that my tongue be merciful so that I should never speak negatively of my neighbor but have a word of comfort and encouragement, (4) that my hands be merciful and filled with good and just deeds so that I may do only good actions to my neighbors and take upon myself the more difficult tasks, (5) that my feet may be merciful so that I may hurry to assist my neighbor for my true rest is in the service of others, and lastly (6) that my heart may be merciful so that I may feel all of the sufferings and joys of my neighbor. I will not refuse my heart to anyone and may Your mercy rest upon me for I trust in Thee, o my Jesus, transform me into yourself, for with You I can do all things.”

Peace be with you (shalom)! We hear this exceptional greeting in today’s Gospel. These are the first words spoken by our Lord, the Risen Christ to his disciples after the Resurrection. Before Jesus gives instruction of explanation, Jesus first sends His peace. The Hebrew word for peace is shalom and it is widely used in sacred Scripture. It is so rich in content that the English word “peace” conveys only a fraction of what it truly means in Hebrew: in fact it means universal completeness, a condition in which nothing is lacking. The state of perfect well-being which the word signifies belongs only to God Himself. When one possesses shalom, it means that one is in perfect communion or right relationship with God and neighbor. If we really think about it, peace is what we are all striving for in our hearts. Not as the world gives peace nor peace in the worldly sense, but the full understanding that emanates from the Risen Christ in all His glory as the cornerstone of our Church--the rock of ages! Christ’s peace is more than just the cessation of violence and hostility. Shalom is more than just a description of the time between wars. The shalom that we seek can only be given to us through our faith and trust in God. To understand this peace that we truly seek, it might be helpful to first discuss what peace is NOT:

(1) **Peace** does not mean that life will be perfect. I believe that we are all experienced enough to know that perfection is something that will not be attained in this life. Martin Luther King says that, “We are crucified by not one event but we are all crucified by life itself!” Peace does not mean that we will be free from disappointments, sorrow, or pain. It doesn’t mean either that we will always be happy and filled with joy. Again, we all know too well that life doesn’t work that way. Life has a way of kicking us around sometimes. In other words, life has a way of sending Good Fridays our way!

(2) **Peace** means that we are tranquil and content. We are tranquil in the knowledge that we are loved by God who emptied Himself to become one of us and who died for us in the ultimate expression of this love. We are content in knowing that God is indeed with us, for us, and in us, and that God will never abandon us, even in our darkest moments. Peace means that no matter what life throws at us, we can face it with the confidence that somehow, some way, God will intercede for us and His love will prevail. If we are following God’s holy path for us and we are doing our very best to live fully and truly live out the Gospel, Christ’s peace--Christ’s shalom--will be ours. Following the Gospel can sometimes be difficult and demanding but remember the words of Jesus who promised that His yoke would be easy and His burden light. We cannot help but experience His peace because we know that Jesus is there with us every step of the way offering His grace to strengthen us. Even if we are still experiencing great sadness, we can still be at peace if we place our trust in God. We trust that our Good Fridays will always be transformed into our Easter Sundays because “in every breaking of the bread, when it is always Easter Sunday, I look for you.”

I know that Jesus was at peace while He carried His cross to Golgotha. He was at peace because Jesus knew that He was doing the Father’s will. Jesus knew that His suffering and pain would end up in glory so, too, the pains and sufferings of this life for us would end in eternal happiness and joy as well. When you find Christ’s peace, you will know it too! When you find it (and I know that many of you have), do whatever it takes to nurture it and strengthen it through prayer and the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion.



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