

Fr. Curtis Miller

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Homily for Divine Mercy Sunday

Today we celebrate the Second Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday. It's a relatively recent holy day, added to the Church's calendar by Pope St. John Paul II in the year 2000.

It's inspired by the mystical revelations received by a Polish nun, St. Faustina, in the 1930s. She had visions of Jesus, in which He appeared pointing to His wounded Heart, from which poured out rays of white and red light, symbolizing the Blood and water that poured out of His Heart when it was pierced by a lance as His Body hung upon the cross. Jesus asked St. Faustina to share the message of His great mercy, reminding us that God loves us abundantly, and that there is no sin that God cannot forgive. In fact, God longs to wrap us in His merciful love and free us from our sins. That is why Jesus became man, suffered, and sacrificed His life for us. That is God's firm pledge of the depth of His merciful love. All He asks is that we turn our hearts back to Him, and repent of our sins. This message of mercy, however, goes beyond the mercy we receive individually; we must in turn be merciful to others, making ourselves channels of God's Divine Mercy. We can only receive God's mercy if we are merciful with others.

The 1930s was a fitting time in history for Jesus to remind us of the power of His mercy, as humanity stood between two of the most deadly wars in history, and on the brink of decades of persecution and suffering for so many around the globe. Jesus reminded us that His mercy is more powerful than any upheavals the world might endure (a good thing for us to remember during this current crisis).

In the Church's liturgical year, the Easter season is also a fitting time to be reminded of Divine Mercy. Pope John Paul emphasized this connection between Jesus' resurrection and His mercy in his homily on the first Divine Mercy Sunday, "Jesus said to St. Faustina one day: 'Humanity will never find peace until it turns with trust to Divine Mercy.' Divine Mercy! This is the Easter gift that the Church receives from the risen Christ and offers to humanity." The pope was teaching that one of the fruits of Jesus' resurrection on Easter is His mercy. If Jesus had not sacrificed His life for us, then we would not have known the depth of His mercy. But if He had not risen from the dead on Easter, He would have seemed to be a mere failed human prophet, without the power to forgive sins. Thanks be to God that Jesus is our Lord, both crucified and risen.

Confronting this mystery of Jesus' resurrection was something His Apostles also had to struggle to understand and accept. In today's Gospel reading, we hear about "Doubting" Thomas, the Apostle who was not present when the risen Christ first appeared to His disciples, and who protested that he would not believe that Jesus was risen unless he could put his finger in the wounds in Jesus' hands, feet, and side. It was a challenge to prove how ridiculous the claim of the other Apostles sounded. How could a man who had been executed on a cross be alive again? And unless this figure bore these

wounds, He could not be the same Jesus, but maybe just a ghost or hallucination. It seemed like a contradiction.

Yet the risen Christ did appear again, and aware of Thomas' challenge, He invited the Apostle to do just what He proposed: touch His wounds. Thomas is turned from skepticism to profound faith, exclaiming, "My Lord and my God!" I think that sometimes we're too hard on Thomas. After all, what would we have thought in his position? It's easier to think that all these people who claim to have seen Jesus alive again were just crazy. But then Thomas had a personal encounter with the risen Christ that he could no longer deny.

The icon depicting Jesus' Divine Mercy appearance to St. Faustina includes a prayer written at the bottom of the image: "Jesus, I Trust in You." Why those words? Wouldn't it make more sense for this image to have a prayer like, "Jesus, have mercy"? But those were not the words Jesus asked St. Faustina to include on this image. Instead, we are left with an admonition to place our trust in Jesus. Why? Because having trust in Jesus is a prerequisite to receiving His mercy. If we don't trust Him, then we will not open our hearts before Him, confident that He will forgive us.

St. Thomas needed to overcome his initial doubt before he could encounter the risen Christ. So we, too, must overcome our doubts so that we can receive His mercy. And what is the sign that Jesus shows to instill trust in us? It's the same as He showed to Thomas: Jesus points to His wounded Heart. It's almost as if Jesus is saying, "See how much I love you! I held nothing back from you, not even My last breath or the last drop of Blood from My Heart. Place your trust in Me!"

May this sign of Jesus' wounded Heart open our hearts to trust Him and receive His mercy. Like St. Thomas, may we profess our faith in Jesus, saying, "My Lord and my God!" then go forth as apostles to spread this message of Divine Mercy to all the world.