

Homily for Second Sunday of Easter (or Sunday of Divine Mercy)

April 19, 2020

Lectionary: 43

JMJ+ come Holy Spirit

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We just heard in the Gospel: “The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you.’” The fact and the joy of the Resurrection was beautifully described in our Gospel which should still give us peace of mind and heart.

We, on this Sunday of Divine Mercy, the Second Sunday of Easter are people of the Resurrection and are now living within the joyful Easter Resurrection season celebrating that Jesus is risen, risen indeed, in this joyous season of 50 days that ends at Pentecost.

We concluded the penitential season of Lent the week before last with the transition period of the Easter Triduum which includes the Holy Thursday Mass commemorating the Last Supper, the Holy Saturday Easter Vigil Mass and the Masses on Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord. Sadly, while the liturgical penitential season is over, a sad penitential season for our country and the world is not over. With the coronavirus pandemic still going on and people getting sick and people dying and with all the restrictions placed upon many millions of people, many people who can’t even work to make their own living, are indeed in trying penitential times.

You are watching this Mass remotely because you are not allowed to be here and worship in person. Many may cry out as Jesus did on the cross on Good Friday: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

However, we should know from our faith that God would not permit evil unless some good would come out of that very evil. As our Catechism says: “Faith gives us the certainty that God would not permit an evil if he did not cause a good to come from that very evil, by ways that we shall fully know only in eternal life.”

We know of the good result of the great evil of the crucifixion that resulted in opening Heaven to us, but experiencing fully what that really means, will only be fully realized in Heaven. We can only guess at why God would allow a particular evil like this coronavirus pandemic that we are experiencing to happen, where people are not even allowed to pray together in normal numbers and normal ways in church buildings.

I saw a cartoon posted by our own Bishop Richard Stika on Facebook that depicted Satan and God overlooking our planet earth. Satan is shown bragging: “With COVID-19, I closed your churches!” But God replies: “On the contrary, I just opened one in every home!” So those of you participating in today’s Mass at home, are one of God knows how many small home churches in the world. Obviously, this is not an ideal situation, but perhaps we can take some solace during these trying times that God, who is infinitely good, and infinitely knowing, understands fully what He is allowing and that His intentions in allowing this plague is for the ultimate good of humanity.

Today we can appropriately reflect on the readings as they may apply to the current condition of restrictions on communal worship. St. Peter told us in the second reading that: “although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Of course, the Church ended up suffering for many years under the Roman Empire, until its legalization in 313 AD, but in light of our belief in eternal life, even those many years are a little while in the light of eternity. Our faith indeed is more precious than gold. And yes, we are suffering through the trial of not being able to pray and receive Holy Communion in the same place together.

The first reading from Acts of the Apostles spoke of the close community of the early Church. How “All who believed were together and had all things in common.” Sounds something like a family situation in the infant Church. In some ways we are in a similar situation to the early persecuted Church where large groups might attract attention of the persecuting authorities, so Christians would have been left with praying at home separately in small groups. However, we now have the blessing of modern media to allow us to pray together remotely, even when physically separated.

Let's close by reflecting on the gift of our faith: Jesus invited St Thomas to touch His hands and side. And Thomas answered and said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus said to him, “Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.” Sadly, you cannot now touch Jesus by means of the Sacrament of Holy Communion, but you are still blessed as Jesus said because you haven't seen Him in the resurrected flesh as St Thomas did, but believe in Him and long to receive Holy Communion and be touched BY Him again.

In the Divine Mercy Chaplet, how appropriate is the refrain to the verse: “For the sake of His sorrowful passion”, which begs God the Father to: “have mercy on us and on the whole world.” What an appropriate opportunity we have on this Divine Mercy Sunday to pray to God for mercy on us and on the whole world! We will be conducting a Divine Mercy holy hour this afternoon at 3 o'clock that will include Eucharistic Exposition and Benediction and the Divine Mercy Chaplet which will be live streamed. So as we prepare to observe the consecration by the priest at the altar of the bread and the wine becoming the Real Presence Of Jesus, let us give thanks that in these trying restrictive times, we may pray together with each other, albeit remotely, through modern media technology as we await the freedom to be able to joyfully participate in person at Mass again.