

Our gospel story on this Second Sunday of Easter is told through the image of the Divine Mercy of Jesus. The resurrected Jesus comes in peace. Literally he walks through a locked door. He is no longer bound by the physical laws of time and space. He comes and goes at will ... appearing and disappearing as if he were the greatest escape artist of all time ... indeed he is. He was crucified and died and placed in the tomb. The large stone could not keep him bound in death. He escaped the tomb and descended to the depths of the dead. There he broke the chains that enslaved all of those marked by the signs of faith. The light of Christ pierced the darkness of death. “The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming forth from their tombs after his resurrection, they entered the holy city and appeared to many” (Mt 27:51-53).

“Give thanks to the Lord for he is good; his love is everlasting” (Ps 118: 1). Again, and again throughout the Octave of Easter, the Church sings Psalm 118 as if receiving from the lips of the risen Christ the great message of divine mercy. Today, on the 8th day, Jesus entrusts his ministry of Mercy to the Apostles in the Upper Room: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you... Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained” (Jn 20: 21-23).ⁱ

In the image of the Divine Mercy, we see the hands and feet of Jesus. The wounds of the Passion are evident and still fresh. Jesus points to his wounds and we especially notice the wound in his heart. From his Sacred Heart flow great waves of mercy poured out on humanity. The two rays of light shining from his heart represent blood and water.

When a soldier on Calvary pierced Christ’s side with a lance, he was trying to ensure Jesus was dead. Both blood and water flowed forth from the wound (cf. Jn 19: 34). Blood connects Holy Thursday and Good Friday. The gift of the Eucharist and the Sacrifice of the Cross are forever united by the Blood of our merciful Savior who died that our sins might be forgiven and who offers us the chalice filled with his Precious Blood.

Water is a rich symbol of both Baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The water, in the symbolism of the John the Evangelist, represents not only Baptism but also the gift of the Holy Spirit:

- Jesus taught “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit” (Jn 3:5).
- Jesus told the woman at the well: “whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (Jn 4:14).
- “On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and exclaimed, ‘Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink.’” Jesus is referring to ‘Rivers of living water ...flow[ing] from within him.’ Through his death and resurrection, Jesus’ body has been glorified and the Spirit is ready to come (Jn 7:37-39).

The text of our Gospel highlights the reception of the Spirit by the Apostles. Jesus breathed on them and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20:22). The same breath of God that was present at the dawn of creation to bring order out of chaos, now brings courage to the Apostles. Their fear disappears and they are ready to forgive our sins and share God’s mercy. The mighty wind (that swept over the waters when the earth was without shape or form) gives order to our life through the Divine Mercy of Jesus (Gn 1:2).

21 years ago on Divine Mercy Sunday, Saint John Paul II canonized Sister Faustina. She is the Polish Nun Jesus asked to be his messenger of mercy through her diary. The pope explained: “Divine Mercy reaches human beings through the heart of Christ crucified.”ⁱⁱ Jesus is love and mercy personified. “Christ pours out this mercy on humanity through the sending of the

Spirit ... And is not mercy love's 'second name' understood in its deepest and most tender aspect, in its ability to take upon itself the burden of any need and, especially, in its immense capacity for forgiveness?"ⁱⁱⁱ

John Paul II designated this 2nd Sunday of Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday. The twentieth century was marked by blood and the death of millions through two World Wars and numerous genocides. Skeptics would say there is no God. In the midst of the pain and suffering of the years in between the two World Wars, Jesus came quietly but definitely to Sister Faustina and sowed seeds of healing and reconciliation. Jesus's Divine Mercy is God's answer to man's chaos and destruction. From his own pierced body, he emanates the love to heal all wounds. It should come as no surprise then that the failing body of John Paul II breathed its last breath on the Vigil of Divine Mercy Sunday in 2005.

In our deeply divided times, we need God's mercy more than ever. As we celebrate God's Divine Mercy, let us not forget to place all our trust in Jesus and to continue to pray for his healing and mercy. "Eternal Father, I offer you the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your Dearly Beloved Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world."

ⁱ vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30111980_dives-in-misericordia

ⁱⁱ vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000430_faustina

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, (also cf. Dives in Misericordia 7).