

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER “A” 2020

My favorite movies are those whose theme is about getting a second chance in life, for example *Shawshank Redemption*, *Les Miserables*, *The Devil at Four O’Clock*, *The Family Man*, and *Captains Courageous*, just to name a few.

Today’s Gospel presents us with another story of someone who got a second chance in life, and that was the Apostle Thomas. We don’t know much about St. Thomas. Details about his life are sketchy. One ancient tradition says he was a builder. Another tradition says that he was the only Apostle to witness the Assumption of Mary—and in a reversal of this Gospel—the other Apostles didn’t believe him until he showed them Mary’s empty tomb.

What is known for certain is that after Christ’s Ascension, St. Thomas traveled as far as India, where he baptized people in Kerala, in the southwestern part of the country. To this day, the banks of the Periyar River are a shrine—revered as the spot where St. Thomas first arrived in the country and baptized. Countless people in the region call themselves “*Thomas Christians*,” descendants of those who first converted to the faith because of St. Thomas.

In [Abruzzo](#), Italy, the Basilica of Saint Thomas the Apostle contains a relic that is said to be a piece of bone from Thomas’ finger. Can you imagine that—the very finger that reached out to touch the risen Christ?

But his legacy extends much farther than relics and stories. You could consider St. Thomas the spiritual father of anyone who has ever questioned, or wondered, or doubted. He speaks for anyone who has ever wrestled with faith—anyone who has ever been challenged to believe the unbelievable or find the incredible credible. In a sense, Thomas speaks for all of us, at one time or another. Thomas speaks for us when our prayer life is weak, when doubt and mistrust are strong, when fear overwhelms us, as it has throughout the world as a result of the coronavirus crisis.

Anyone who has ever struggled with faith, or felt distant from God, can find a kindred spirit in St. Thomas, which is why this Gospel passage is so critical and relevant—especially today, Divine Mercy Sunday. It isn't just that Thomas came to believe and was moved to exclaim, "*My Lord and my God,*" but it's HOW it happened.

In John's account, Jesus first appeared to the Apostles while Thomas wasn't there—and Thomas, as we heard, was incredulous. He didn't buy it. It sounded too good to be true. Show me, he said. So Jesus appeared a second time. This time, Thomas was there. He saw and believed.

And it all happened for one reason: because Jesus gave Thomas another chance. Jesus offered him another opportunity—a way back from doubt to faith, from skepticism to belief.

Jesus knew what Thomas needed. Jesus knew what was lacking. So Jesus, the font of Divine Mercy, returned to that upper room a second time, in a gesture of mercy, that left one man

profoundly changed. A skeptic became a saint. It happened for Thomas. It can happen for all of us because God is merciful.

And that's why, as we heard in today's Gospel, on the night of His Resurrection, Jesus gave the Church the beautiful Sacrament of Reconciliation so that everyone would have the opportunity to begin again, to start anew, to have a second chance to experience God's Mercy. In fact, the Sacrament of Confession is the greatest, guaranteed way to experience God's mercy.

Also God's Mercy is what lies at the heart of this particular Sunday

celebration, known as Divine Mercy Sunday. This beautiful feast is the reaffirmation of the eternal truth that Jesus revealed, namely, that we have a God who is merciful, who came not to condemn the world but to save it.

From the moment of his birth when the Son of God received His earthly name "*Jesus*" which means "*And God shall save us from our sins*" and all through His earthly life, Jesus proclaimed and shared His Mercy with all who would believe and receive it—whether it was Matthew, the tax collector who would become one of his 12 Apostles or Zacchaeus, another tax collector, the corrupt little man whose life would change because He wanted to see Jesus, or the woman caught in adultery whom Jesus saved from death or Mary Magdalene from whom delivered 7 demons or the many other sinners with whom Jesus associated and saved. And then, even at the very end, Jesus continued to proclaim that message of mercy when He spoke from the cross, "*Father, forgive them for they do not*

know what they are doing,” and when He promised Paradise to the Good Thief who turned to Him at the end.

Several times in history, when many people forgot God’s message of mercy, God gave the world special revelations through certain saints to remind us of His mercy—revelations, such as the Sacred Heart Devotion to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and the Devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary that St. John Eudes promoted, or the revelations through Jesus’ Blessed Mother at Lourdes, Fatima and *Medjugorje*. And, in the past century, once again, God revealed His mercy through St. Faustina. It is this revelation that gave us this feast day that St. Pope John Paul II established on April 2, 2001.

This divine mercy is available to anybody who would seek it out. It is as easy as ABC. ABC is an acronym that teaches us how to receive and share God’s divine mercy.

A – Ask for God’s Mercy. God welcomes us whenever we come to Him

seeking His mercy and when we express a sincere repentance of our sins. In addition to the Sacrament of Confession, Jesus revealed to St. Faustina three other ways of asking for divine mercy: the Chaplet of Mercy, the Divine Mercy Novena (nine days of prayers), and a special daily prayer of mercy that is to be said at 3 o’clock every day.

B – Be merciful. In the Beatitudes Jesus says, “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*” (Matthew 5:7), and in his Letter, St. James adds, but “*judgment is without mercy to one*

who has shown no mercy” (James 2:13). And then the Lord’s Prayer reminds us that God forgives us in the measure that we forgive those who trespass against us (Luke 6:12-14). And also, to be merciful, we need to learn and practice the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy.

C – Completely trust in Jesus. We need to believe and trust in God’s mercy. There are people who believe their sins are so bad and so many that they are beyond God’s forgiveness. In His revelation to Saint Faustina, Jesus says, *“I have opened My Heart as a living fountain of mercy. Let all souls draw life from it. Let them approach this sea of mercy with trust”* (1520).

Finally, once we have experienced God’s mercy, like St. Thomas, we need to be missionaries and witnesses of the mercy of God. Thomas traveled all the way to India to share the gift of mercy he had received. We don’t have to go as far. Just start at home.

As I said earlier, my favorite movies are those whose theme is about getting a second chance in life. Today’s Gospel story is about someone who got a second chance in life, and that was the Apostle Thomas. He speaks and represents all of us because all of us are in need God’s Mercy. I hope and pray that we will join Thomas in experiencing God’s Divine Mercy, and then become missionaries and witnesses of the incredible mercy of God.