

## Fr. Ryan's Homily April 19, 2020

A Blessed Divine Mercy Sunday to everyone. Today I would like to read for you not only the Gospel but the second reading as well from this Sunday's mass because I think the words of St. Peter are quite relevant when we hear them this year. So, we begin with reading from the 1<sup>st</sup> letter of St. Peter:

Read: 1 Peter 1:3-9

Read: John 20:19-31

This Gospel is always the Gospel we hear on the second Sunday of Easter. Normally we would be hearing it in church, of Jesus entering through the walls of the place where the disciples were staying. This year, just like these disciples, we hear it not in church but within the walls of our homes. And just like for them, Jesus has the power to enter into your midst and mine wherever we are. How appropriate we hear this Gospel, this Sunday because it's happening all over again. We are huddled in our homes as they were, but the walls can't keep Jesus away. And he comes into your midst and mine and he says, "Peace be with you". So everything that Jesus has gone through, everything that he has suffered, he did so to bring us that peace, to bring us that mercy. We look back at the opening line of the second reading, it's great because it says we should praise him for that. Peter writes: blessed be God the father of our lord Jesus Christ who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Mercy has been given to us through Jesus Christ. And for that mercy to be made real for us we have to give mercy in turn. Jesus says as much directly to you and I today. He says so the father has sent me, so I send you. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven, whose sins you retained are retained. Now we believe that refers very uniquely to the sacrament of penance, to confession. As Catholics we believe that the clergy have been given the power to forgive sins by the authority of God in confession. But I don't know that that applies to just to priests and bishops. The power to forgive sacramentally, yes that belongs solely to priests and bishops but all Christians have been given the power in their lives to forgive or to retain. It's amazing isn't it. That we can so easily cherish hurts, hold on to anger and by doing it we bind ourselves. And then we bind the people around us. One unpleasant person, one bitter, angry person in a family or in an

office, on a team, in a parish can restrict the actions of other people, of those around them. The image that pops into my mind as I pray about all of this is that of Gollum. Remember Gollum from the Lord of the Rings? Who is this little creature obsessing over a ring and it warps him, it deforms him to something that is shriveled up and gross, just a shadow of his former self. As he stares at this ring calling it "my precious, my precious." And for some people the ring they obsess over is resentment, it's unforgiveness, anger. And they cherish it and hold onto it because it's become precious to them. And they can't even see what their unforgiveness has turned them into. And it not only affects them personally but it has negative consequences on all them around them. It brings them down as well. Just like this portrayal of Gollum in the Lord of the Rings. Our bitterness extends beyond ourselves. And in the same way our forgiveness, our clemency, our forbearance, they extend beyond ourselves as well. Each of us to some degree has a power to forgive or to hold bound the people around us. Because Jesus said, "as the father has sent me, so I send you." The very mission of Christ was to reconcile God and man. The Father sent him for the express purpose of forgiving. And he was subjected to indescribable cruelty for the very purpose that he might forgive it. That means that for us every hurt, every slight, every offense should be an opportunity to do what the Lord has sent us to do. To forgive, to reflect Him. And by doing that we show others the presence of Christ within us. As the father has sent me so I send you to do the same thing. But sometimes we say, I just can't forgive. You know, we define ourselves sometimes by our bitterness that we have disliked our hated or been angry with someone for so long that it almost defines who we are. You say, but I can't forgive. And Jesus says you are going to receive power from on high. You will receive power to do that very thing. Maybe it was a year or so ago there was a story in the news I believe it came out of Texas about a police officer who was on trial for going into a person's house and murdering 2 people. And her defense was she thought she had walked into her own house and that the men were intruders. And so she shot them. The jury didn't buy that, she was found guilty, but during the trial, the brother of 1 of these slain men took the stand. And while he was up there, you know what he did? He said to this police officer, looking her right in the eyes, he said I forgive you and I truly only want what's best for you. You know, he said I don't even want you to go to jail. This incredible act of mercy. He said what I want is for you to come to know Jesus Christ and to give him your life. And this news clip of him saying that, his name is

Brandt Jean, the officers name if Amber Guyger, this clip it swept the country, a bunch of people saw it. And it ends with Brandt asking the judge if he can give the person who murdered his brother, a hug. And the judge allows it and the two of them embrace. Now the country, the people who saw that, they were blown away by it. And I'm sure not everyone could understand, could wrap their minds around how forgiveness like that could happen. But I guarantee you everyone was drawn into that example, to ask how could he do that. Where did that power to forgive come from? Well we know the answer. Brandt wasn't forgiving on his own, Christ was working in him. Brandt didn't have the power to forgive in that moment, nor do you and I in our own lives. Mercy can only be given by someone superior to an inferior person, we're told that in scripture. So I can't forgive on my own, but I can ask God to extend mercy through me to the person whom I can't forgive. In other words, I can say Lord, I can't find it in myself to forgive them, but you forgive them for me. Have mercy on them Lord. Jesus even said to pray for those who persecute you. When you can't forgive, there is a power, the very breath of God, the Holy Spirit living in you who can do the forgiving for you. So ask mercy from God for those who have offended you. Again we go back to that reading from St Peter, he says in this you rejoice. 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 revealing of Jesus the Messiah. Folks, if we want to receive that mercy from God, we must be made into instruments of mercy. Over these past few weeks as we're spending most of our time at home with our family, nerves can become stretched, patience with each other can run thin, and maybe we start to snip at each other, we don't hold our tongue, or maybe we have a lot of time to think about old resentments, about grudges that are long past letting go of, and ask ourselves am I really being that instrument of mercy I'm being called to be. Well remember St Peter's words that right now you and I are being asked to suffer through these various trials to prove the genuineness of our faith. So that if these imperfections are within us, they can be shown to us. And if we need to, we can go before God and say it's time I get past these things. It's time I forgive and move on but Lord I need you power within me if I am to be able to do it. Friends now is the time to deal with these things, on the celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday. As we think of the great examples of forgiveness by others, by people like Brandt Jean who can embrace

the person who murdered his brother. We think of the examples of the martyrs or Jesus himself. When I recall those examples, how can I cling to my petty resentments and in so doing warp myself into my own version of Gollum. Today Jesus enters through the walls of our homes that we would be inspired to be at peace with one another, and to forgive those people as Christ has asked us to. Who insult us or hurt us in such small ways. May we appear before the throne of God brilliant as gold, tested by fire, shining as stars in a darkened world.

Amen