

Second Sunday of Easter: Divine Mercy A2023

Today we celebrate the Divine Mercy Sunday. The Divine Mercy Sunday reminds us that our God is compassionate, forgiving and forbearing. His mercy is bigger than our sins and his compassion larger than our faults. It is by his grace that we live and by his love that we gather as his body, the Church.

From the beginning of creation God showed his mercy and love by sending his son Jesus into the world to be our savior. Jesus showed the mercy and love of the Father by dying on the cross for our salvation. When the time of his passion came up, as he was arrested, the disciples run away and the courageous Peter who was following at distance ended by denying him. They all went on hiding for fear of the Jews.

But, after our Lord resurrected from the dead everything changed. The Acts of the Apostles report that they were united in a communal life, devoted to the teachings of the Apostles, to the breaking of the bread and to prayer. The teaching of the apostles, which is the continuation of Jesus' teaching, the breaking of the bread, which is, the Eucharist and prayer, are the pillars on which the life of the Church is founded.

The word of Jesus, the Eucharist and prayer, give to the Church its full meaning as a community of believers. Where these are not taken seriously, the Church becomes like any other gathering or association. This is true not only for the church in general, but also for the domestic church, which is the family. When a family does not get along, when its members do not pray together and listen to the word of Jesus, they open the door to dispute and dislocation.

The unity of the Church is assured by the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit inspires within the Church different gifts so that its members put them at the service of one another for the building of the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit works at the heart of the church for the growth of the word of Jesus. The Holy Spirit sustains the Church in its prayer so that it may be done in the spirit of Jesus. And it is the Holy Spirit who guides the Church in the celebration of the Eucharist and any activity offered in the name of Jesus.

Then, it makes sense that the first gift the Risen Christ gives to his disciple is the Holy Spirit. Where the Holy Spirit reigns, there peace reigns. The peace that our Lord gives to his disciple is born out of forgiveness. Without forgiving one another and without forgiving the wrong done to us, we will never have peace. Forgiveness is born out of wounds. That is why our Lord showed them the scars of his hands and his side. Those scars are the marks of his wounds, the wounds of rejection from those who crucified him and the wounds of denial and betrayal from his disciples. Our Lord reassured them that he has forgiven them. Peace, indeed, comes to us only when we accept to forgive the wounds inflicted to us.

Our Lord wants us to live in peace and to have peace. He wants us to have the peace of heart that nothing and nobody can give us in this world. Such peace comes out of reconciliation with the Father and the fellow human beings. Thus, we understand why our Lord gives to his disciples the power to forgive and retain sins. They do it not on their own, but on his behalf. They are his representatives toward their brothers and sisters. They prolong his mercy and forgiveness to those in need of God's compassion.

It is in that sense we have to understand the importance of the sacrament of reconciliation. By giving an order to his disciples to forgive sins, our Lord institutes the sacrament of reconciliation. He gives to the apostles a ministry to be exercised in his name for the good of the whole Church. By giving the sacrament of reconciliation, our Lord comes to the rescue of our sinfulness and weakness so that we count on God's mercy. Without God's forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation, we are lost. That is the main reason why our Lord gives this sacrament so that we reconcile with our God, with one another and with ourselves.

The sacrament of reconciliation requires that we turn in faith to our Lord; we present him our weakness and confess that we need him and his mercy because without him we can do nothing. Without faith we cannot adequately approach our Lord and understand how he operates in this sacrament. Then, the words of St Peter become clear: "Although you have not seen him you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls".

Faith is not believing without proof, but trusting without reservation. Proof deals with material things; while trust belongs to the order of confidence. Trust is justified on the basis of conviction that I am not wrong by trusting the word of the testimony given to me.

That is what lacked in Thomas as we heard in today's Gospel. He wanted to see before believing. He did not trust the testimony of his friends who told him they have seen the risen Lord. For Thomas faith should be proven by facts in order to be credible. The testimony given by his friends did not have for him the value of truth unless he experienced the truth himself. And yet, the resurrection of Jesus, which is the foundation of our faith, does not belong to the realm of proof, as people do with scientific facts. It has to be approached in faith and trust that God, who is faithful to himself, could not leave Jesus in the tomb forever.

That is why the reproach of Jesus to Thomas, "do not be unbelieving, but believe", is a warning to each of us. It is also an indication that faith is, first of all, a matter of trust in God's word and in the witness of those who have been his followers from the beginning. Faith can never be based on what one sees, but in the acceptance of the testimony of the first eyewitnesses of our Lord's life, death and resurrection. We need that faith today more than ever. Let us open our hearts to the gift of faith. Let us come before the Lord with trust and ask him to forgive us our sins in the sacrament of reconciliation.

Acts 2: 42-47; 1 Peter 1: 3-9; John 20: 19-31



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