

Second Sunday of Easter—Sunday of Divine Mercy

April 24, 2022

Reading I

Acts 5:12-16

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

R (1) Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.

Reading II

Rev 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19

Gospel

Jn 20:19-31

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

HOMILY:

The earliest documented instance of a person being revived by mouth-to-mouth resuscitation took place on 3 December 1732 in the town of Alloa in Scotland. The incident was described by surgeon William Trossach in the Edinburgh Society's *Medical Essays and Observations*, published in 1744. The patient was a man called James Blair, who had been one of the first to descend into a coal mine following a fire. He had been overwhelmed by fumes and collapsed at the bottom of a long ladder. William Trossach estimated that Blair lay in the mine for between 30 and 45 minutes, before being pulled back out by a second rescue team. When he reached the surface, he was not breathing and had no detectable pulse. Dr Trossach began performing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation as soon as Blair was brought up, and was able to detect a very faint pulse after a few breaths. He continued for a little longer, until Blair began breathing unaided. Although breathing again, Blair remained unresponsive and cold to the touch, with his eyes open and motionless.

After an hour, Blair's eyes began to move and eventually he yawned and regained consciousness. He was disoriented and had no awareness that any time had passed since he'd collapsed the mine, but was

otherwise fine. Within a week, he was back at work, with no apparent ill-effects aside from pain in his back from being dragged up the ladder by his rescuers.

Breath, of course, is essential for life. It is for this reason that the Biblical accounts of creation and salvation speak of breath—beginning with Genesis 2:7, where the first “mouth to mouth,” or more accurately “mouth to nose” resuscitation happens, when the breath of God is breathed into the first human: “then the LORD God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” At creation, God breathes into our nostrils the breath of life.

In today’s gospel, we see a continuing example of divine resuscitation, when the disciples, laid low by the death of Jesus, are gathered together “behind closed doors” of fear, when Jesus, the Creator, comes to recreate them. And God recreates them as they were created, with a breath from his mouth: There, we are told that Jesus promises them peace and then “when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the holy Spirit” (John 20:22). We speak much about “salvation,” being saved, which means being restored to life—and Jesus does this by breathing his Spirit, which must be Holy because it’s His Spirit, a breathing which revives them. So, there is a straight, divine line between Genesis 2:7 and John 20:22, where Jesus breathes his Holy Spirit into his disciples and revives them.

But...as we consider God breathing life into us, one more passage: these are the words of our Blessed Mother Mary, in her Magnificat, where, while visiting her kinswoman Elizabeth who is “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41), speaks with the same fullness of the Holy Spirit (for she bears Jesus within her) as part of her hymn of praise to the ways of God these words: “His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him” (Luke 1:50). The Mercy of God, which we recall on this Divine Mercy Sunday, literally means that God’s mercy is a remembering of His promises, to which God is always faithful. And...we experience God’s faithful promises when he breathes his life into us, that is saves us, by his life that is always mercy—faithfully mercy.

No matter how life goes, we’ll always be in need of mercy—in need of God’s faithful love—in need of resuscitation. Come, Holy Spirit, and revive us with your life breath that is mercy, that same breath that transforms ordinary bread and wine into God’s divine life, given to us here to resuscitate us!