

**Second Sunday of Easter**  
***Divine Mercy Sunday***  
**April 24, 2022**  
**Homily for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass**  
**of St. Thomas More Catholic Parish**  
**celebrated at**  
**St. Joseph Catholic Church**  
**116 Theodore Street**  
**Scranton, PA 18508**  
**John 20:19-31**

Today's Gospel is the basis in Scripture for the Sacrament of Confession. On the very evening of the Day Jesus rose from the dead, He indicates to the assembled apostles that their mission will be the forgiveness of sins, the sanctification of the faithful. "*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven*" are the words by which our Lord gives the Church's first bishops the authority to absolve the penitent while at the same time showing us the necessity of confessing our sins.

But before anybody confessed his sins to any of those men, we see that they were all first forgiven. Jesus greeted them with the words, "*Peace be with you.*" He spoke those words three times, a corollary to Peter's three denials of Jesus and his three confessions of his love for Jesus. God's mercy is such that their failures are not held against them—their falling asleep in Jesus' time of trial, their running away when Jesus needed to be accompanied, their hiding behind locked doors even after they had heard the Good News of His Resurrection. This circumstance is the same for every confessional in the world. Before your confessor ever absolves you, he has first been forgiven. The mercy he dispenses is the Divine Mercy the priest has already received.

And note that Jesus does not throw in their faces all the failures we've already recounted. Nor do they mention them. As they see face to face the glorified Christ for the first time, they are before Him in stunned silence, both grateful and overwhelmed. St. John describes the same reaction on receiving from Jesus a vision of our Lord in heaven: "*When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.*" To receive the beatific vision is to be overcome by its beauty, and the ugliness of our past life is forgotten.

If the disciples' failures were not a subject for discussion on the day of Jesus' Resurrection, we can be sure that if we die in a state of grace, neither will our sins be fodder for discussion. The moment will be one not of rebuke, but of encouragement. St. John writes, "*...he laid his right hand upon me, saying, 'Fear not...'*". Our Lord's tender mercy is illustrated here; He wants life for us, more than we even desire it for ourselves. The Judgement Day will not be one of humiliation for us, but of vindication. Our trust in the Lord will be rewarded, and His love for us will be evident, as evident as it was to St. John on Patmos and to the other apostles.

St. Thomas, however, does earn our Lord's rebuke, but not for the sins of his past life. Remember that Thomas had been the first to pledge that he would die with Jesus. Well before St. Peter made his own profession, and Jesus prophesied his threefold denial, St. Thomas said, "*Let us also go, that we may die with him,*" in chapter 11 of St. John's Gospel. The context of this bravado was Jesus' journey to Bethany, so close to Jerusalem, where the authorities were on the lookout for Jesus, so they could kill Him. Jesus doesn't bring up this failure to keep a promise, nor Thomas's abandonment of Him when

Jesus needed help to carry His cross. What Jesus rebukes Thomas for is his disbelief. *“Do not be faithless, but believing.”*

After everything Jesus had told him would happen, even after the disciples themselves had told him that Jesus had in fact risen from the dead, Thomas called everyone a liar. Except for this blasphemy, all his sins were forgotten, but this denial was worse than all the rest. He was saying that God is not true to His promises, indeed that Jesus is not God. Thomas had returned to the fellowship at long last, but he wanted the benefits without the responsibility. How could he be a messenger of God’s forgiveness, a vessel of God’s grace, if he did not know first that he had been forgiven, that he had received God’s grace?

Blessedly, Thomas recovered, and he became the great Apostle to India, where to this day Catholics there call themselves Thomas Christians. But his stupendous works on behalf of the Gospel were only possible because he relied on the grace of God Himself to go forward. Our sins can be forgiven and forgotten, but only one sin prevents us from doing what God wills for us to do. If our lack of faith prevents us from doing what we were created to do from the beginning, we should expect a similar rebuke. It is faith that precedes all our good works. Indeed, we won’t even know what to do until we have it. We certainly can’t preach mercy unless we know it has first been shown to us.

So the first step in whatever missionary journey has been assigned to us is to seek and receive the forgiveness St. Thomas neglected. He thought he needed proof to say, “I believe.” What he needed was the humility to say, “I’m sorry.” If he had humbled himself, he would not have been humiliated, nor would his name so often be associated with doubt instead of faith. If in the face of God’s mercy we are silent rather than proud, we can be sure we’ll receive the Lord’s words and touch, not the rebuke Thomas suffered before, thanks be to God, he recovered.