

1. Today is the Second Sunday of Easter; more recently in our Church's history, it has become known as Divine Mercy Sunday. In our Gospel reading we see how Jesus has mercy on "Doubting Thomas" but the passage involves so much more than the encounter with the skeptical apostle. It is rich with lessons of Christ's mercy to all, including an encouraging word from our Lord, especially for us, His modern-day disciples.

2. While Thomas traditionally takes all the bad rap for his doubts, we see that none of the Apostles were at their best when Christ first appears to them after His resurrection. The passage says that they were in hiding, cowering behind a locked door because they were afraid of what the Jews might do to them for their association with Jesus. They were paralyzed by fear and doubt.

3. But Jesus appeared right in their midst, in spite of the lock on the door. Did he come to rebuke them for their lack of faith? To chide them for abandoning Him when He needed them most? To call them out for being so wimpy? Quite the contrary.

4. He comes on a mission of mercy. He comes to offer them peace and the restoration of their relationship with Him. And even more, He commissions them to become ministers of His mercy, by giving them the authority to forgive sins. "Peace be with you," He says:

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you.... Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained (Jn 20:22-23)."

At that moment Christ gives to all of us the supreme gift of mercy — the sacrament of Reconciliation. What a precious and powerful gift is this divine mercy.

5. A couple of explanations. First, how is it, that you as lay persons, can pray a prayer in which you say, "Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and divinity of Your dearly beloved son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world." I thought only a priest could do that! Well, there is a time when you do do that. It is in the "offering" of the Mass. That is when I, as your priest, *with you, together*, we offer the Body and Blood of Jesus to the Father. That is one of the reasons each Christian needs to be in Mass on Sunday. You cannot do that alone. I don't see how a person who is not regular in Mass, at the offering, can pray with integrity this prayer.

6. The second is that Divine Mercy Sunday is a perfect time to reflect on how well we make use of the gift of Reconciliation. Do we really appreciate the healing power of this sacrament? The infusion of grace, the freeing power of knowing we are forgiven, the increase in self-knowledge, and intimacy with our Lord? Could we become better stewards of this gift by going to Confession more often and by encouraging our loved ones to do so as well?

7. A third reflection is that the power of Divine Mercy, when understood in the Church and with the power of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, that power leads us to soften our hearts, to forgive one another (Matt 6:14-15). This also calls us to fellowship together:

"We must consider how to rouse one another to love and good works. We should not stay away from our assembly, as is the custom of some, but encourage one another, and this all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Heb 10:25).

This certainly would include encouraging each other in forgiveness. Many who don't receive regularly the teaching of the Church, either are too permissive and tolerant to everything, or they can become so judgmental that they will not forgive nor share with certain others.

8. Finally, this practice of mercy is fundamental to our American way of life and our success.

When people expect the possibility of mercy, of being forgiven, this provides a greater freedom to be honest. I have seen this in the behavior of the Russian military. Everybody fears the condemnation of their superiors. Hence, they tell them what they think they want to hear, for they fear that if they disagree, they could be killed. This is why Putin probably isn't getting honest reports from the front, and probably contributes to the very poor performance of the army. In our case, there is more tolerance for disagreement, for honest conflict, for correcting errors. I believe that our understanding of the practice of divine mercy is part of the reason for our productivity, our flexibility, and strength. When we obey God, He rewards us!

9. Today is also an opportune time to examine how generously we offer the gift of mercy to those around us.

When Thomas obstinately declared he would not believe in the risen Christ unless he could see for himself the mark of the nails in His hands and put his fingers into the nail marks and put his hands into His sides, our Lord does not become indignant. He offers mercy. Jesus graciously gives Thomas the very thing Thomas is asking for — a real and personal encounter with Him, the chance to literally touch His sacred wounds to heal Thomas from his doubts. When we are disbelieved or disrespected, do we respond as Jesus did, with humility and magnanimity and compassion, the very hallmarks of mercy?

10. Interestingly, we will find that the more deeply we embrace the gift of mercy through regular Confession, the greater will be our capacity to offer mercy to others because we will see ourselves as really truly are — forgiven sinners deeply loved by God. Let's commit ourselves to become faithful disciples, stewards of Christ's mercy 2,000 years after His Resurrection. We will be those very ones to whom Jesus gave a "shout out" during His encounter with Thomas: "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed" — in His merciful love.

11. I, therefore, invite everyone this weekend to participate in the promise of a plenary indulgence. What must we do? First there are the usual or standard three conditions of 1) Sacramental Confession, 2) Eucharistic Communion, and prayer for the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff. Next are the specific conditions or "work" required on "Divine Mercy Sunday."

12. In any church or chapel, in a spirit that is completely detached from the affection for a sin, even a venial sin, take part in the prayers and devotions held in honor of Divine Mercy or, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament exposed or reserved in the tabernacle, recite the Our Father and the Creed, adding a devout prayer to the merciful Lord Jesus (e.g. "Merciful Jesus, I trust in you!")

13. I invite us to participate fully in this spiritual discipline today. For English speakers we will gather at 3:00 p.m. to pray, celebrating the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, the Our Father, and the Creed and praying a devout prayer to the merciful Lord Jesus. We may do this immediately following the Mass for the Spanish congregation. Flyers and brochures about the Divine Mercy are on the table in the hall.