

REFLECTION FOR 2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER (DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY) 2021

The readings for this Divine Mercy Sunday are about God's mercy, the necessity for trusting Faith, and our need for the forgiveness of our sins.

The opening prayer addresses the Father as "*God of everlasting Mercy.*" In the Responsorial Psalm (Ps 118), we repeat several times, "*His mercy endures forever!*"

The disciples had abandoned the Lord at his Passion and felt guilty. But after his resurrection, when Christ appeared to his disciples, there was no words of bitterness, disappointments, condemnation or blame from the mouth of Christ. His first words to them were: 'Peace be with you'. What an assurance of his mercy, forgiveness, love and peace God is never tire of reaching out to lift us up when we fall.

When Christ appeared to his disciples he also breathed on his disciples and then the extraordinary commission: "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

So the risen Lord empowered his disciples and commissioned his disciples to be channels of his mercy, forgiveness, peace and love.

Without mercy and forgiveness, the culture of death advances, families crumble, nations falter.

Let us accept God's invitation to celebrate and practice mercy. We radiate God's mercy to others by our actions, our words, and our prayers. Christ's mercy shines forth from us whenever we reach out to the poor, the needy and the marginalized. We Christians in this world must become a spark of Christ's light.

When the risen Lord appeared to the disciples on that first Easter Sunday, they were filled with joy, they all saw him with their own eyes except for Thomas.

When the other disciples told Thomas 'we have seen the Lord,' Thomas answered, 'unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe.'

We need to meet the challenge for a transparent Christian life — "*I will not believe unless I see*" (Jn 20:25). This "seeing" is what others demand of us. They ask that we reflect Jesus, the Risen Lord, in our lives by our selfless love, unconditional forgiveness, and humble service. The integrity of our lives bears a fundamental witness to others who want to see the Risen Lord, alive and active, working in us.

Like St. Thomas, let us use our doubts to help us grow in Faith. It is our genuine doubts about the doctrines of our religion that encourage us to study these doctrines more closely and, thus, to grow in our Faith. This will naturally lead us to a personal encounter with Jesus through our prayer, study of the Word of God, and frequenting of the Sacraments. However, we must never forget the fact that our Faith is not our own doing but is a gift from

God. Hence, we need to augment our Faith every day by prayer so that we may join St. Thomas in his proclamation: *"My Lord and my God"* (Jn 20:28).

Thomas had to wait an entire week before the risen Lord appears again and then Thomas saw him and believed.

We normally don't like to wait when pray. In fact we often hate to wait especially when we have been nice enough to tell God what we want and how we want it and why we want it. And we want God to deliver it on our schedule.

Was there something that Thomas needed to learn during that waiting? Perhaps that lesson was this, if you want to see the risen Lord don't isolate yourself from the faith community.

Our journey of faith doesn't take place in isolation. We don't have to walk to heaven alone.

To be a believer, in today's world can be lonely. We need support. We see the kind of community the first Christians enjoyed. They supported one another by praying, worshipping together, and by a loving service of one another. Our common faith strengthens the faith of each individual.

Many people in our world today say that they are 'spiritual'. That they don't need a religion, they don't need to belong to a community of believers or church.

But I think Thomas learned a different lesson. Thomas felt left out the first time the risen Lord appeared to the rest of the disciples when he absented himself from the faith community. But the next week Thomas was there and so were the other believers and so was the risen Lord.

Thomas experience might teach us that we literally can not survive or flourish as people of faith without the other people of faith around us to love us, to encourage us, to teach us, to strengthen us, to challenge us and share faith with us.

The journey to Jesus doesn't happen in isolation. If we live in isolation, whose feet will we wash, if we live in isolation whose burdens will we help bear, if we live in isolation whose crosses can we help carry, if we live in isolation whose wounds will we dress, if we live in isolation whose tears will we dry, if we live in isolation where will we find twos and threes gathered in the Lord's name, if we live in isolation how will we ever seen the Lord at work in people who inspire us.

There is nothing more important in life than experiencing the risen Lord. So don't walk away for the body, the faith community where the risen Lord has revealed himself for 2,000 years.

We must share in the Divine life of Jesus by frequenting the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist. St. Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa) presents it this way: "If we pray, we will believe; if we believe, we will love; if we love, we will serve.

May we Easter people today be also God's channel of mercy, forgiveness, peace and love.

Fr Patrick.