

Second Sunday of Easter C - Feast of Divine Mercy - My Lord and my God

April 24, 2022.

Our Triduum celebration has once again come and gone. Participation in the liturgy has probably been a deeply moving and inspiring experience for many. But now life goes on as before, in a world that does not seem to have been changed. The words of the Preface, **‘The joy of the resurrection renews the whole world’**, don’t seem to ring true. As this mood overtakes us, let us imagine that the apostles themselves too did not find it easy to come to terms with what the Saviour’s victory over death meant for them. They had looked forward to sharing with Jesus in his messianic triumph, but now their world seemed to go on as before. It is remarkable that all four gospels tell of the ‘doubts’ and ‘hesitations’ of the apostles as they came to faith in the Lord’s Resurrection. In today’s gospel reading from John (John 20:19-31) these doubts are expressed by Thomas, who questioned Jesus at the Last Supper, ***We don’t know where you are going; how can we know the way***. Perhaps we shall find the way forward in the faith journey of this Easter season if we reflect upon Jesus’ greeting of “Shalom”—“Peace be with you.” used twice when he came among the disciples on the evening of his resurrection day, and repeated when he returned to confirm the faith of doubting Thomas. As we look out on today’s world, thoughts of ‘peace’ the world yearns for are often in our minds especially with the current Russia invasion of Ukraine. **Many times we have been told that we can only be peacemakers if we are at peace in ourselves; and we know from the times we have experienced true peace, that peace is more than the absence of conflict – it is a positive coming together of all that matters in our lives.**

After the crucifixion, as he hides in the city, Thomas must be a bundle of fear, grief and guilt. There are few human emotions so devastating. Then discovering his friends with the same problem had been visited by Jesus and given authority to heal the very emotions with which he suffered was hard for him to manage. It is hard to imagine how Thomas must have felt when the other apostles told him they had seen Jesus, risen and alive. His reply in John’s Gospel sheds some light on the anger and hurt filling his heart, as he stubbornly protests believing in Jesus’ resurrection until he could see and touch the wounds from the crucifixion. Filled with shame he blurts out: ***“Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”*** Thomas won’t believe it for himself. He certainly won’t believe it from the mouths of his friends, who have been empowered to restore relationships: ***Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*** But Thomas still hangs around, even though he is convinced that nothing can ever get better for him, that he deserves nothing better. The following week Jesus appears again, says Shalom, and immediately invites Thomas to touch his wounds. Like a dam bursting, Thomas’s fear, grief, shame, and hopelessness floods out and he collapses in adoration. **“My Lord and my God”**.

The Second Sunday of Easter is also the Feast of Divine Mercy. This encounter between Jesus and Thomas is most fitting for this feast. This feast is quite new for the Universal Church, as it was inaugurated on the canonization of St. Maria Faustina on April 30, 2000. St. Faustina was a Polish religious sister who received many revelations and commands from Jesus to spread devotion to Divine Mercy. The famous painting of Jesus with white and red rays coming forth from him, with the inscription, **“Jesus, I trust in you,”** was painted from a vision St. Faustina received. The Chaplet of Divine Mercy and the feast itself were both requests from Jesus to St. Faustina. His words and the beautiful story of her life are recorded in her Diary, which is worth reading many times over. **St. John Paul II canonized St. Faustina and was deeply devoted to spreading the message of Divine Mercy.** The celebration of the feast of Divine Mercy as the culmination of the Easter Octave is not to be overlooked. Easter is the

holiest feast. It is so holy that it takes us eight days to fully celebrate the glory of this one day. And, as the crown of the octave, stands the feast of Divine Mercy. **Jesus desired to make abundantly clear that he died out of love for us, and he will stop at nothing to shower that love upon us.** He says to St. Faustina: ***“If souls would put themselves completely in My care, I Myself would undertake the task of sanctifying them, and I would lavish even greater graces on them. There are souls who thwart My efforts, but I have not given up on them; as often as they turn to Me, I hurry to their aid, shielding them with My mercy, and I give them the first place in My compassionate Heart.”*** (Diary, 1682). The interaction between Jesus and Thomas is brought to life with these words. **Jesus showers Thomas with mercy and even greater graces than had he first believed. This is our God who is perfect, just and superabundantly merciful!**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the writer of John’s Gospel concludes the story by telling us why he selected this one from among all the incidents he could have recounted. He writes: ***Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”*** In one way or another we all stumble into life moments when we are seized by fear, remorse, grief, and loss. Our lack of belief that things can get better isn’t atheism or agnosticism, but rather a deeply personal conviction that we are the exception, the one left out. Doubting is a complicated matter. It can indicate a critical mind, one that asks questions, and never takes things at face value. The opposite is a gullible mind: one that is the delight of unscrupulous sales persons, dangerous politicians, and many televangelists. There’s another type of doubt, one driven by deep emotion, an emotion stimulated by loss. It’s a form of despair, a despair that clings to loss and refuses to believe that there is any future other than one described by that which is lost. Life will never be the same again. Friends assure us that we will get over our loss of a job, an ambition, our loss of a relationship or the death of a dear one but we don’t want to hear it. We can’t believe it. Thomas’s doubt is of this second type.

The significance in the gap of a week between the encounters could be St. John’s way of pointing us deeper in the direction that Jesus is the **“Way, Truth and Life”**. Just as the Early Christians, we offer the Shalom, the Peace, before the Eucharist, during which Jesus comes among us and invites us to explore his wounds. As we touch him, he enters us and, by faith, we let loose everything that has obscured his presence. He offers new life when we couldn’t believe one is possible. It is when we have opened our wounded hearts to the merciful heart of Jesus and received the gift of his resurrected life, that we can drop to our knees and exclaim with Thomas: **“My Lord and my God”**. If the legend is true, after Thomas obtained a new life, he took the message of Christ’s teachings, his death and resurrection, reconciliation and forgiveness as far as India. Like Thomas, Christ’s resurrection gives us new life: we should repent our doubts, go to Confession, and share our faith with others. In our day, the forgiveness of sins must still be preached to all nations. There is no time for delay, the Resurrection has an immediate consequence in our life. Let us take to heart the mission Christ has given us, and continue to preach his forgiveness. **May God, for the sake of his beloved son, our Lord Jesus Christ’s sorrowful passion, have mercy on us sinners and on the whole world. Amen.**