

Cycle C 2nd Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday

Reading I, Acts 5:12-16

Many signs and wonders were done among the people at the hands of the Apostles. They were all together in Solomon's portico. None of the others dared to join them, but the people esteemed them. Yet more than ever, believers in the Lord, great numbers of men and women, were added to them. Thus they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them. A large number of people from the towns in the vicinity of Jerusalem also gathered, bringing the sick and those disturbed by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.

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

I, John, your brother, who share with you the distress, the kingdom, and the endurance we have in Jesus, found myself on the island called Patmos because I proclaimed God's word and gave testimony to Jesus. I was caught up in spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a voice as loud as a trumpet, which said, "Write on a scroll what you see." Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and when I turned, I saw seven gold lampstands and in the midst of the lamp-stands one like a son of man, wearing an ankle-length robe, with a gold sash around his chest. When I caught sight of him, I fell down at his feet as though dead. He touched me with his right hand and said, "Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, the one who lives. Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever. I hold the keys to death and the netherworld. Write down, therefore, what you have seen, and what is happening, and what will happen afterwards"

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 nail marks 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.

He died on Easter Monday...9 weeks after being diagnosed with bronchitis on Valentine's Day. We buried him today on Easter Saturday. We knew him as Francis for only 12 years. He was a giant among our 266 Popes; and the most humble among men...he washed and kissed the feet of prisoners. He made us laugh when he told his dear friend Rabbi Abraham Skorka with whom he wrote the book *On Heaven and Earth*, "Skorka, I came here to Rome, and they won't let me go back to Buenos Aires!"...he never made it back home. Pope Francis revealed God's merciful love when he said, "who am I to Judge?" As the "pope for the people" he taught us how God's merciful love and peace is for the whole human family by visiting 68 countries, including 14 Muslim countries.

He taught us about God's infinite mercy when he pleaded for peace in his last address a week ago on Easter: "...Sisters and brothers, especially those of you experiencing pain and sorrow, your silent cry has been heard, and your tears have been counted; not one of them has been lost! In the passion and death of Jesus, God has taken upon himself all the evil in this world and in his infinite mercy has defeated it.... Christ is risen! These words capture the whole meaning of our existence, for we were not made for death but for life. Easter is the celebration of life! ...I would like us to renew our hope that peace is possible! In Gaza... in Lebanon...in Syria, in Yemen, in Ukraine, in Armenia and Azerbaijan, in the western Balkans, in the Congo, in Sudan and South Sudan, in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, in Myanmar... May the principle of humanity never fail to be the hallmark of our daily actions. In the face of the cruelty of conflicts that involve defenseless civilians and attacks on schools, hospitals, and humanitarian workers, we cannot allow ourselves to forget that it is not targets that are struck, but persons, each possessed of a soul and human dignity."

Pope Francis told us that he took to heart the words of his friend Cardinal Hummes, who told him, "Don't forget the poor." And so he chose to be named after St. Francis of Assisi, "the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation...the same

created world with which we don't have such a good relationship ...How I would like a church that is poor and that is for the poor.”

Dear Pope Francis, we love you and are praying for you. Please, pray for us. Rest in Peace...Live in Peace!

Today is Divine Mercy Sunday, which is celebrated on the second Sunday of Easter. I am reminded of a Mass in 2021 which Pope Francis celebrated at the 16th century Church of Santo Spirito in Sassia, which is the official Divine Mercy church in Rome. In keeping with Covid-19 health protocols the service was broadcast and only some 80 people were permitted within the Church for the Mass. They included male and female prison inmates, nurses, disabled persons, refugees, migrants, and some ‘Missionaries of Mercy’ priests concelebrating with the Pope at the altar. He said in his homily some profound words of mercy and peace: “...For if love is only about us, faith becomes arid, barren and sentimental. Without others, faith becomes disembodied. Without works of mercy, it dies...Let us be renewed by peace.... Let us ask for grace to become witnesses of mercy. Only in this way will our faith be alive and our lives unified. Only in this way will we proclaim the Gospel of God, which is the Gospel of mercy.”

The reality of today's Scriptures is that God loves us so much that he raised Jesus from the dead so that we would not be unbelieving, but would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief we would have life in His name. The question is “How will we respond?” Will it be like the people in the 1st reading who experienced miracles and then believed? Or are we like Thomas, having doubts about what others say and want to experience the Risen Christ for ourselves? Or are we like the Apostles in the Gospels, believers who don't immediately recognize the Risen Christ in our midst? When will we believe and start acting like it? Thank God, Jesus is merciful and patient with us.

The Apostles and Pope Francis had great faith that conquered the world. But the Risen Christ is not only reserved for saints and holy people. Like them, we all can encounter Him and can be witnesses to the Risen Christ every day of our lives. If we only open ourselves to the experience and don't let arrogance or our hard hearts get in the way, we will have numerous opportunities to experience Him and in fact be the Body of Christ to others. Thank God, Jesus is merciful and patient with us. Every one of us are invited into a deep personal encounter with Christ when we least expect it, in the most unlikely places, that shows us God's merciful love brings us peace.

Easter 2010 was one of the last times I saw my friend Jack who had ALS. His breathing was much more labored, but he still told stories non-stop from his wheelchair. And, his hands were more knarled, but he could still hold a fork with a big spongy sleeve over the handle. And he could still grip the stem of a wine glass. Jack put it well, "ALS can cripple my body, but the death of hope would cripple my spirit. Therefore, I hope in the Lord." Isn't that what Easter is all about? We may have to face tough times, but we believe that God's merciful love is greater than any suffering. Jack showed us that what can seem to be a dead-end terminal illness, is the miracle of eternal life waiting to happen. Jack was a remarkable man who was not only experienced the Risen Christ transform his life with the power of the Resurrection, but he was also in fact the Body of Christ to others.

In all the Scriptures today, another fact is evident...people experience the power of the Risen Lord in the works of mercy the community does in the name of Jesus. Our faith needs a community of believers. It is only within the faith of the People of God, that each of us can come to believe. So the role of our whole community, extending beyond our St. Andrew Catholic Church, is crucially important. There are people everywhere who serve the needs of others in many ways: by caring for the children, the sick, and the elderly, by providing food for the hungry, teaching and leading faith communities, supporting the vulnerable, praying for others, or just being a friend. Look around in our pews today...we

are surrounded by people who are the Body of Christ for others. Together we will help each other to believe!

Every one of us here can both encounter the Risen Christ and be the Body of Christ as our life intersects the lives of others...and we don't have to be saints or a Pope or even Catholic. We too have our Porticos of Solomon, our supermarkets, schools and ministries. We too can be the healing touch of Jesus in a world of suffering and violence. We too can be the reason others come to Christ.

Let us never forget how the Apostles, how Pope Francis, and how my friend Jack responded to God when they were called to become an instrument of His merciful love and a model of how to be merciful to others. When will we believe that we can live our daily life for others as the Body of Christ? It's up to each one of us to make every day Divine Mercy Day!!

Christ is Risen! Alleluia!Alleluia!