

Sunday, April 19, 2020

2nd Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday)

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Acts 2:42-47

2nd Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-9

Responsorial: Psalm 118: 2-4, 13-15, 22-24

Gospel: John 20: 19-31

Rejoicing in God's Divine Mercy and Love, *A Foundation of Our Lives*

Jesus came . . . and stood in their midst. (John 20:26)

Jesus had appeared to the disciples on Easter Sunday. So why did he come a week later to the exact same place? Perhaps it was because this time Thomas was there, and Jesus wanted to convince this doubt-ridden disciple that he had truly risen from the dead.

Jesus could have stayed away, but he didn't want to leave Thomas in that state. So he invited Thomas to touch his wounds and see that it was really him. And that act of compassion and patience—that act of mercy—led Thomas to proclaim, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Eventually, that mercy would lead Thomas to travel far and wide proclaiming the gospel and, in the end, give his life for his Lord.

Thomas' story shows us that God's mercy involves more than just the forgiveness of our sins, great as that is. It also involves his compassion for our weakness and his patience with our slow progress. It's a wide mercy that frees us from our doubts, fears, and guilt as well as our sin. Like Thomas, it allows us to experience Jesus' divine life more fully so that we can follow him wherever he leads us.

In the end, God's mercy cannot be separated from his love. He is love and he is mercy—that is his very nature. Every day Jesus comes and stands in our midst, desiring to show us that he is our Lord and God. Every day he wants to take away our doubts and fears and forgive our every sin. Every day he wants to open us to more of his life and blessings.

Don't ever underestimate the power of divine mercy! As you continue to read from the Book of Acts this Easter season, know that every miracle the apostles did, every word they spoke, was grounded in the mercy they had first received—and continued receiving to the end of their lives. God's mercy is the foundation of your life too, a mercy that is new every morning, a mercy that will never, ever end (Lamentations 3:22-23)!

"Jesus, I trust in you!"

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

Sunday, April 19, 2020

Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. The first reading begins with these words: *They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. It ends with these words: And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*
 - How would you describe the characteristics of the early church that caused it to attract so many people?
 - Which of these characteristics would benefit the Church today?
 - What steps can you take to help make them a greater reality in your parish?
2. In the responsorial psalm we hear these words: *Let those who fear the Lord say, "His mercy endures forever." I was hard pressed and was falling, but the Lord helped me. My strength and my courage is the Lord, and he has been my savior. The joyful shout of victory in the tents of the just. It ends with these words: The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it.*
 - The response to the psalm is *Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting*, and the psalm's refrain is *His mercy endures forever*. In what way is the message of the psalm one of hope and trust in the Lord's great mercy and love, especially in times of trouble?
 - Why do you believe the psalmist was so filled with joy and confidence that he could exclaim, *This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it*?
 - What can you do to make this your disposition each morning when you first wake up?
3. The second reading opens with these words: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you who by the power of God are safeguarded through faith, to a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the final time. It continues with these words: In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*
 - How do the opening words relate to the Church's teaching on the importance of Baptism and faith?
 - The words that follow speak of joy during trials and suffering, and the basis of this joy. How would you describe the basis of our joy as Christians? How often do you reflect on these in prayer or during the day?
 - If you were to increase these times of reflection, what impact do you think it would have on how you lived out your day? What simple steps can you take to cause this to happen?
4. The Gospel reading begins with these words: *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 ... The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. However, Thomas, who wasn't there, says, 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. After appearing to him, he proclaims, My Lord and my God. Jesus then responds to Thomas with these words, Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and believe.*
 - What message is being conveyed by the Gospel reading in contrasting the joy of the disciples when they saw the Lord with the doubts of the apostle Thomas?
 - What message was Jesus conveying by saying, *Blessed are those who have not seen and believe*?
 - How has the risen Lord revealed who he is to you so that you are also able to say, "My Lord and my God"?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the Gospel reading regarding St. Thomas and includes these words: "Thomas' story shows us that God's mercy involves more than just the forgiveness of our sins, great as that is. It also involves his compassion for our weakness and his patience with our slow progress. It's a wide mercy that frees us from our doubts, fears, and guilt as well as our sin. Like Thomas, it allows us to experience Jesus' divine life more fully so that we can follow him wherever he leads us. In the end, God's mercy cannot be separated from his love. He is love and he is mercy—that is his very nature."
 - What do the words above mean to you, including: "God's mercy cannot be separated from his love"?
 - What steps can you take to open yourself more to God's merciful love?

Take some time now to pray that you would experience more deeply God's "Divine Mercy" -- and that you use it as an instrument of his mercy to others. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

"Jesus, I trust in you!"

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization (www.christlife.org), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National Fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]