

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER OR DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY, C

DOUBT NO LONGER, BUT BELIEVE

“Thomas put your finger here; look, here are My hands. Give Me your hand; put it in My side. Doubt no longer, but believe” (Jn. 20: 27)

Second Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday: On every Second Sunday of Easter, since its inauguration by St. Pope John Paul II, the Church celebrates Divine Mercy Sunday. Divine Mercy devotion is a gift from our Lord through His daughter, St. Maria Faustina, who had the special privilege of conversing with Jesus numerous times. On some of those occasions, Jesus specifically instructed Maria to paint a picture of the vision of mercy with rays (red and white) coming from His Sacred Heart signed with the words: “Jesus, I trust in you.” The Lord also instructed: I want the image solemnly blessed on the first Sunday after Easter, and I want it to be venerated publicly so that every soul may know about it (Diary 341). Today, both the picture and the devotion has spread beyond the Catholic world. Thus, the Church celebrates the Divine Mercy of God poured out to us in Christ by His Passion and Death.

The Theme of Mercy: The Readings at this Mass focus on the mercy of God. In the First Reading (Acts 5: 12-16), the mercy of God flows through the hands of the Apostles, who are given the gift of healing and deliverance as physical expressions of God’s forgiveness of His people. In the Psalm (117), we sing the praise of God, Who in his mercy, keeps His Covenant with Abraham, Moses, and David for ever as it is fulfilled in the Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection of His Son. The Second Reading (Rev. 1: 9-13, 17-19), Jesus reveals Himself to John, the Beloved Apostle, as a high-ranking priest of the Old Testament, whose duties were to offer sacrifices to God for the forgiveness of the sins of His people (Lev. 4: 20). The Gospel (Jn. 20: 19-31) tells the story of Jesus’ visits to His disciples. On the first occasion, Thomas, called The Twin, was not there. When the others told him, he refused to believe unless he sees the Lord himself. The Lord, in His mercy, returned to visit to save a drowning Thomas from his doubts and possible damnation. This story has earned Thomas the popular nickname, “The Doubting Thomas.” But on this occasion of the celebration of Divine Mercy, we can look at this narrative from the perspective of God’s mercy shown to Thomas as shown to us too.

Before We Judge Thomas: It is easy for us to jump to criticism of Thomas for doubting the resurrection of his Master as testified by his colleagues. But before we do so, it is necessary for us to pause and reflect for a moment on the context

of this episode. First, the subject and reality of resurrection was unprecedented and a novelty beyond human imagination at the time. This explains why the disciples could not fathom the idea even when Jesus mentioned it prior to His death. Secondly, the apostles were all of them as disbelieving as Thomas. Last Sunday, the Gospel we read (Jn. 20: 1-9) ended with these words: "Till this moment they had failed to understand the teaching of the scripture, that He must rise from the dead" (Jn. 20: 9). St. Mark is even more specific in his accounts of the disbelief of the disciples: "When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, *they did not believe*. After this he appeared in another form to two of them walking along on their way to the country. They returned and told the others; but *they did not believe them either*" (Mk. 16: 11-13). Thirdly, the other disciples only believed in the Resurrection only after they had seen the Lord. Until now, they were like Thomas. Fourthly, Thomas only needed something to hold onto. He needed something tangible, something from the senses to convince the mind, just as the others did so that he could believe.

Divine Mercy: The return visit or the second appearance is the first time Jesus is meeting all the remaining eleven Apostles together. The last time He saw them, they were all running for their lives, abandoning Him at the time He needed them most. But there was no upbraiding of the Apostles by Jesus on this occasion. Instead, His first words were: "Peace be with you." Their rejected forgotten, their sins written off. Jesus understood their fears, and now comes to give them renewed hope and confidence. This is what divine mercy means. Similarly, Jesus knew the struggle of Thomas. The All-knowing God always knows the inner groans of His children. Divine Mercy means that God stoops down to meet us where we are and lifts us up from there. This second appearance was for Thomas. He does not abandon him in his unbelief but goes an extra mile to save one of His own. This is how Jesus treats us: He gives us a second chance time and time again to console, encourage and restore to our original position of grace and reconciliation. So that God's mercy, through Christ, may be extended to all peoples of all generation, Jesus commissions and ordains His Apostles as agents of Divine Mercy, giving them authority to forgive sins. "As the father sent Me, so am I sending you ... receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained" (Jn. 20: 21-23). This authority has been passed down to priests of today in an unbroken tradition. Thus, Christ's faithful can encounter and embrace God's loving mercy at the Sacrament of reconciliation through the ministration of His priests, who continue to serve as *alter Christus*.

My dear friends, it is highly recommended that we be committed to the Divine Mercy devotions, especially by praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet at three O'clock daily, among others. Let the words of Jesus to Thomas "Doubt no longer but believe" resound in our ears and resonate in our hearts. So that believing without seeing, we may receive that divine blessing in full.