

HOMILY SYNOPSIS: EASTER II (April 23) (DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY) L/17

Introduction: The readings for this Sunday are about God's mercy, the necessity for trusting Faith and the need for the forgiveness of 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!*" God revealed His mercy, first and foremost, by sending His only-begotten Son to become our Savior and Lord by His suffering, death and Resurrection. Divine mercy is given to us also in each celebration of the Sacraments, instituted to sanctify us.

Scripture lessons:The first reading (Acts 2:42-47) tells us how the early Church grew every day because of the acts of mercy and sharing, the sacrificial *agápe* love practiced by the early Christians. In the second reading (1 Peter 1:3-9), St. Peter glorifies God, the Father of Jesus Christ, for showing us His mercy by granting Resurrection from the dead and glorious Ascension into Heaven to His Son, Jesus, thus giving us the assurance of our own resurrection. Today's Gospel vividly reminds us of how Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Reconciliation, a sacrament of Divine Mercy. The risen Lord gave his Apostles the power to forgive sins with the words, "*Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained*" (Jn 20:19-23). Presenting the doubting Thomas' famous profession of Faith, "*My Lord and my God,*" the Gospel illustrates how Jesus showed his mercy to the doubting apostle and emphasizes the importance of Faith.

Life messages: 1) We need to accept God's invitation to celebrate and practice mercy in our Christian lives: One way the Church celebrates God's mercy throughout the year is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Finding time for Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is another good way to receive and give thanks for Divine Mercy. But it is mainly through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy that we practice mercy in our daily lives and become eligible for God's merciful judgment. 2) Let us ask God for the Faith that culminates in self-surrender to God and that leads us to serve those we encounter with love. Living Faith enables us to see the risen Lord in everyone and gives us the willingness to render to each one our loving service. The spiritual Fathers prescribe the following traditional means to grow in the living and dynamic faith of St. Thomas the Apostle: a) First, we must come to know Jesus personally and intimately by our daily and meditative reading of the Bible. b) Next, we must strengthen our Faith through our personal and communal prayer. c) Third, 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. Only then we put our love of God into action."

EASTER II [A] (April 23) Acts 2:42-47, I Peter 1:3-9, John 20:19-31

Anecdote#1: Divine Mercy in action: A *TIME* magazine issue in 1984 presented a startling cover. It pictured a prison cell where two men sat on metal folding chairs. The young man wore a black turtleneck sweater, blue jeans and white running shoes. The older man was dressed in a white robe and had a white skullcap on his head. They sat facing one another, up-close and personal. They spoke quietly so as to keep others from hearing the conversation. The young man was Mehmet Ali Agca, the pope's would-be assassin (he shot and wounded the Pope on May 13, 1981); the other man was Pope St. John Paul II, the intended victim. The Pope held the hand that had held the gun whose bullet tore into the Pope's body. This was a living icon of mercy. John Paul's forgiveness was deeply Christian. His deed with Ali Agca spoke a thousand words. He embraced his enemy and pardoned him. At the end of their 20-minute meeting, Ali Agca raised the Pope's hand to his forehead as a sign of respect. John Paul shook Ali Agca's hand tenderly. When the Pope left the cell he said, "What we talked about must remain a secret between us. I spoke to him as a brother whom I have pardoned and who has my complete trust." This is an example of God's Divine Mercy, the same Divine Mercy whose message St. Faustina witnessed. (<http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0308.asp>)

2: Edith Zierer the Jewish holocaust survivor: "Pope saved me from death:" Edith Zierer, a Holocaust survivor now living in Israel, recalls how Karol Wojtyla, who later became Pope John Paul II, carried her to safety after she fled a Nazi concentration camp when she was 13 years old. Polish-born Zierer was 13 when she ran away from the Nazi camp at Czestochowa in Poland after the Soviet army liberated it in January 1945, five months before World War II ended in Europe. She was heading towards her hometown in Poland to find her parents, who, she would later learn, had died in the Holocaust. Exhausted, she reached a train station and sat there for two days without food or water while people ignored her. "Suddenly, there he was," Zierer said, referring to Wojtyla, the seminarian, in his priestly robe. "He brought me some tea and two pieces of bread with cheese and then carried me to a train carriage. He sat with me and put his cloak on me because it was freezing. We came to Krakow and then I ran away because people started to ask why a priest was walking with a Jewish girl." After spending, a few years in orphanages in Poland and France, Zierer emigrated from Europe to British-mandated Palestine, where she later married and bore a son and daughter in what became Israel. She now has five grandchildren. She wrote to Wojtyla after he became Pope in 1979, saying she was the little girl he had saved at the train station in Poland decades ago. After a correspondence ensued, the Pontiff invited her to the Vatican in 1998. She last met him in 2000, when he visited Israel on a millennium pilgrimage and met several survivors at the VadVashem Holocaust

museum. She said she and the Pope kept up their correspondence, writing mostly during Christmas and before birthdays. "I received a letter from him last year and I knew it was the last," she said. "He included a picture from his private collection and his handwriting was very shaky. I wrote to thank him for the memory that never left." Edith Zierer, 84, mourned the death of her former savior, and remembered the warm look in the seminarian Karol Wojtyla's eyes in the railway station years ago and God's mercy expressed in his actions. "He was a kindred spirit in the greatest sense -- a man who could save a girl in such a state, freezing, starving and full of lice, and carry her to safety," she told Reuters. "I would not have survived had it not been for him." (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3067156,00.html>). Pope John Paul made mercy the core of his priesthood. He saw mercy as a light against darkness. And has the world known darker times than when the Nazis and Communists oppressed millions of people? On April 27, 2014, Divine Mercy Sunday, John Paul II, along with Pope John XXIII, was officially recognized as a Saint. It is no accident that Pope St. John Paul who was instrumental in spreading the observance of Divine Mercy Sunday was canonized on that Feast.

3: St. Faustina and the Image of Divine Mercy: St. Faustina of Poland is the well-known apostle of Divine Mercy. On the 30th of April, 2000, at 10:00 AM on the Second Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday, the Feast requested by Jesus in His communications with St. Faustina), His Holiness Pope St. John Paul II celebrated the Eucharist in Saint Peter's Square and proceeded to the canonization of Blessed Sister Faustina. [John Paul himself would be canonized on this same Feast Day – April 27 in 2014 – by Pope Francis.] Saint Faustina invites us by the witness of her life to keep our Faith and Hope fixed on God the Father, rich in mercy, Who saved us by the precious Blood of His Son. During her short life, the Lord Jesus assigned to St. Faustina three basic tasks: 1. to pray for souls, entrusting them to God's incomprehensible Mercy; 2. to tell the world about God's generous Mercy; 3. to start a new movement in the Church focusing on God's Mercy. At the canonization of St. Faustina, Pope St. John Paul II said: "The cross, even after the Resurrection of the Son of God, speaks, and never ceases to speak, of God the Father, who is absolutely faithful to His eternal love for man. ... Believing in this love means believing in mercy." "The Lord of Divine Mercy," a drawing of Jesus based on the vision given to St. Faustina, shows Jesus raising his right hand in a gesture of blessing, with his left hand on his heart from which gush forth two rays, one red and one white. The picture contains the message, "Jesus, I trust in You!" (*JezuufamTobie*). The rays streaming out have symbolic meaning: red for the Blood of Jesus, which is the life of souls and white for the water

of Baptism which justifies souls. The whole image is symbolic of the mercy, forgiveness and love of God.

Introduction:The readings for this Sunday are about God's mercy, the necessity for trusting Faith and the need for God's forgiveness of sins. The opening prayer addresses the Father as "God of Mercy." In the Responsorial Psalm (Ps 118), we repeat several times, "*Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever.*" God revealed His mercy, first and foremost, by sending His only-begotten Son to become our Savior and Lord by His suffering, death and Resurrection. Divine Mercy is given to us also in each celebration of the Sacraments. The first reading (Acts 2:42-47), shows us how the early Church grew every day because of the acts of mercy and sharing, the sacrificial *agápe* love practiced by the early Christians. They expressed their love and mercy by sharing what they had with everyone in need. In the second reading (1 Peter 1:3-9), St. Peter glorifies God, the Father of Jesus Christ, for showing us His mercy by granting Resurrection from the dead and glorious Ascension into Heaven to His Son, Jesus, thus giving us the assurance of our own resurrection. Jesus' Resurrection, in turn, gives us a guarantee for our own resurrection and entry into Heaven and "imperishable and unfading" Heavenly bliss. In today's Gospel, as we recall Jesus' appearance to the Apostles on that first Easter evening, we are vividly reminded of the Sacrament of Reconciliation – the power to forgive sins which Our Lord gave to His Apostles, saying, "*Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained*" (Jn 20-23). Today's Gospel also emphasizes the importance of Faith in the all-pervading presence of the risen Lord of Mercy. To believe without having seen is every later Christian's experience. We are invited to receive liberation from doubts and hesitation by surrendering our lives to the risen Lord of Mercy. Let us ask God our Father to open our hearts so that we may receive His Mercy in the form of the Holy Spirit.

The first reading (Acts 2:42-47) shows us how the early Church grew every day because of the acts of mercy and sharing, sacrificial, *agápe* love practiced by the early Christians. They expressed their love and mercy by sharing what they had with everyone in need. Some of them even sold their property and entrusted the money to the Church so that the poor might be helped and supported. We are told that they got the inspiration and good will for the practice of love and mercy because of their sense of being one believing community. They were strengthened by their punctual and active participation in the "Breaking of the Bread"– the Eucharistic Liturgy. They became single-minded and merciful because of what they learned from the apostles and because of their fellowship and prayer life.

In the second reading (1 Peter 1:3-9), St. Peter glorifies God, the Father of Jesus Christ, for showing us His mercy by granting to His Son, Jesus, Resurrection from the dead and glorious Ascension into Heaven. Jesus' Resurrection, in turn, gives us a guarantee for our own resurrection and entry into Heaven and "imperishable and unfading" Heavenly bliss. St. Peter encourages the early Christians by assuring them that their sufferings under the Roman emperor, the Jewish authorities and their own pagan family members will be amply compensated by the Heavenly reward waiting for them.

Exegesis: Today's Gospel: The first part of today's Gospel (verses 19-23), describes how Jesus entrusted to the apostles His mission of preaching the "Good News" of God's love, mercy, forgiveness and salvation. This portion of the reading teaches us that Jesus uses the Church as the earthly means of continuing His mission. It also teaches us that the Church needs Jesus as its source of power and authority, and that it becomes Christ's true messenger only when it perfectly loves and obeys Him. The risen Lord gives the apostles the authority to forgive sins in His Name. He gives the apostles the power of imparting God's mercy to the sinner through the gift of forgiving sins from God's treasury of mercy. In the liturgy, the Church has proclaimed the mercy of God for centuries through the Word of God and the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. The Gospel text also reminds us that the clearest way of expressing our belief in the presence of the risen Jesus among us is through our own forgiveness of others. We can't form a lasting Christian community without such forgiveness. Unless we forgive others, our celebration of the Eucharist is just an exercise of liturgical rubrics.

The second part of the Gospel (verses 24-29), presents the fearless apostle St. Thomas in his uncompromising honesty, demanding a personal vision of, and physical contact with, the risen Jesus as a condition for his belief. Thomas had not been with the Apostles when Jesus first appeared to them. As a result, he refused to believe. This should serve as a warning to us. It is difficult for us to believe when we do not strengthen ourselves with the fellowship of other believers. When the Lord appeared to Thomas later, He said: "Blessed are those who have not seen but have believed." Thomas was able to overcome his doubts by seeing the risen Jesus. Modern Christians, who are no longer able to "see" Jesus with their eyes, must believe what they hear. That is why Paul reminds us that "Faith comes from hearing" (Rom 10:17).

The unique profession of Faith: Thomas, the "doubting" apostle, makes the great profession of Faith: "*My Lord and my God.*" Here, the most outrageous doubter of the Resurrection of Jesus utters the greatest confession of belief in the Lord Who rose from the dead. This declaration by the "doubting" Thomas in today's Gospel is very

significant for two reasons. 1) It is the foundation of our Christian Faith. Our Faith is based on the Divinity of Jesus as proved by His miracles, especially by the supreme miracle of His Resurrection from the dead. Thomas' profession of Faith is the strongest evidence we have of the Resurrection of Jesus. 2) Thomas' faith culminated in his self-surrender to Jesus, his heroic missionary expedition to India in A.D. 52, his fearless preaching, and the powerful testimony given by his martyrdom in A.D. 72.

Life messages: 1) Let us accept God's invitation to celebrate and practice mercy. One way the Church celebrates God's mercy throughout the year is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Finding time for Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is another good way to receive Divine Mercy. The Gospel command, "*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful,*" demands that we show mercy to our fellow human beings always and everywhere. We radiate God's mercy to others by our actions, our words, and our prayers. It is mainly through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy that we practice mercy in our daily lives and become eligible for God's merciful judgment.

2) Let us ask God for the Faith that culminates in self-surrender to Him and leads us to serve those we encounter with love. Living Faith enables us to see the risen Lord in everyone and gives us the willingness to render to each one our loving service ("Faith without good works is dead" James 2:17). It was this Faith in the Lord and obedience to His missionary command that prompted St. Thomas to travel to India to preach the Gospel among the Hindus, to establish seven Christian communities (known later as "St. Thomas Christians"), and eventually to suffer martyrdom. The Fathers of the Church prescribe the following traditional means to grow in the living and dynamic Faith of St. Thomas the Apostle. a) We must come to know Jesus personally and intimately by our daily and meditative reading of the Bible. b) We must strengthen our Faith by the power of the Holy Spirit through our personal and communal prayer. c) 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. Only then we put our love of God into action."

3) We need to meet the challenge for a transparent Christian life -- "I will not believe unless I see." 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. Christ's mercy shines forth from us whenever we reach out to the poor, the needy and the marginalized, as St. Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa) did. His mercy shines forth as we remain open to those who struggle in Faith, as did the Apostle Thomas in today's Gospel. We should

be able to appreciate the presence of Jesus, crucified and raised, in our own suffering and in our suffering brothers and sisters, thus recognizing the glorified wounds of the risen Lord in the suffering of others.

4) Like St. Thomas, let us use our skepticism 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."

5) Let us have the courage of our Christian convictions to share our Faith as St. Thomas did and to recognize the "nail marks." We are not to keep the gift of faith locked in our hearts, but to share it with our children, our families and our neighbors, always remembering the words of Pope St. John XXIII: "Every believer in this world must become a spark of Christ's light." "We all have scars from our own Good Fridays that remain long after our own experiences of resurrection. Our 'nail marks' remind us that all pain and grief, all ridicule and suffering are transformed into healing and peace in the love of God we experience from others and that we extend to them. **The 'nail marks' of Jesus are all around us in the lives of those walking their own Calvarys. Jesus calls us to be willing to place ourselves in the pain and struggle of others and bring the joy and peace of Easter into hearts entombed in winter cold and darkness.**" (Connections).

JOKE OF THE WEEK: 1) Traffic cop's mercy: A priest was forced by a police officer to pull over for speeding. As the officer was about to write the ticket, the priest said to him, "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*" The police officer handed the priest the ticket, and said, "*Go, and sin no more.*"

2) Photographer's mercy: The story is told of a politician who, after receiving the proofs of a picture, was very angry with the photographer. He stormed back to the man's studio and screamed at him: "This picture does not do me justice!" The photographer replied, "Sir, with a face like yours, what you need is mercy, not justice!"

3) "Law v Mercy" In *Reader's Digest*, Jim Williams of Montana, writes: "I was driving too fast late one night when I saw the flashing lights of a police car in my rearview mirror. As I pulled over and rolled down my window of my station wagon, I tried to dream up an excuse for my haste. But when the patrolman reached the car, he said

nothing. Instead, he merely shined his flashlight in my face, then on my seven-month-old in his car seat, then on our three other children, who were asleep, and lastly on the two dogs in the very back of the car. Returning the beam of light to my face, he then uttered the only words of the encounter. 'Son,' he said, 'you can't afford a ticket. Slow down.' And with that, he returned to his car and drove away." Sometimes mercy triumphs over law. So it is for sinners who call out to Jesus."(Sent by Fr.pgolden@richmondcathedral.org on March 1, 2013)

(10 additional homilies are appended to the attached homily)

Divine Mercy Official website: 1) <http://divinemicysunday.com/>

2) <http://www.divinemicyministries.org/>

3) <http://thedinemicy.org/news/story.php?NID=2453>

4) http://www.divinemicysunday.com/homily_starter.htm

5) <http://www.americancatholic.org/Features/JohnPaulII/DivineMercy.asp>

6) <http://www.catholicbible101.com/divinemicyofjesus.htm>

7) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYKwqi5QViQ&feature=player_detailpage (Fr . Ray Kelly surprised a bride and groom by singing a custom-made cover of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" at their wedding, demonstrating divine mercy).