

## **SYNOPSIS OF EASTER- II (SUNDAY OF DIVINE MERCY) HOMILY**

**Introduction:** The readings for this Sunday are about God's mercy, the necessity for trusting Faith and our need for the forgiveness of our 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, in sending His only-begotten Son to become our Savior and Lord through 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 stresses the corporal acts of mercy practiced by the early Christian community before the Jews and the Romans started persecuting them. Practicing the sharing love, compassion and the mercy of God as Jesus taught, this witnessing community derived its strength from community prayer, "the Breaking of the Bread" and the apostles' teaching read at the worship service. The second reading: After focusing on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, John reminds us that we practice spiritual works of mercy by obeying God's commandments given in the Old Testament and especially Jesus' commandment of loving others as He loves us with selfless, sacrificial, agape love. Loving others as Jesus loves us also demands that we treat others with God's mercy and compassion. 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 community 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 [B] (**DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY**) (April 8, 2018)

(Acts 4:32-35, I John 5:1-6, John 20:19-31)

Anecdote # 1: Pope praises French policeman who gave his life to save a hostage: Pope Francis joined leaders praising a French police officer who "gave his life out of a desire to protect people" during a terrorist attack. Pope Francis sent a message of condolence to Bishop Planet, expressing his sadness over what occurred, entrusting the victims to God's mercy and praying for the families of the victims. Bishop Alain Planet of Carcassonne and Narbonne celebrated a memorial Mass for the police officer March 25 in Trebes. According to the BBC, the bishop compared Beltrame to St. Maximilian Kolbe, who died at the Nazi's Auschwitz death camp in Poland after volunteering to take the place of another prisoner. "There is no greater love than to give one's life for one's brothers." It is with these words that the Diocese of the Armed Forces hailed the ultimate sacrifice of Gendarmerie Lieutenant-Colonel Arnaud Beltrame. Lt. Col. Arnaud Beltrame, 44, had convinced the

gunman, identified as Redouane Lakdim, to allow him to take the place of a woman Lakdim was holding hostage March 23 in a grocery store in Trebes, a small town in southern France. Lakdim had already killed the passenger in a car he had hijacked in the nearby town of Carcassonne and had shot at a group of police who were jogging near their barracks, injuring one of the officers. He then drove to the grocery store and reportedly entered shouting that he was part of the Islamic State group. Lakdim killed the store's butcher and a shopper. Although police managed to get Lakdim to let other shoppers leave, he kept one woman with him as a human shield. Beltrame offered to take her place and, media reported, he left his mobile phone on a table with an open line so that police outside could hear what was happening. When they heard more gunshots, the police stormed the supermarket and killed Lakdim. Beltrame was seriously wounded and died later in a local hospital. Heroes of faith like Arnaud Beltrame continue to demonstrate Divine Mercy in our century of terrorism.

#2: Mercy during tragedy: The news is filled with illustrations of mercy—or the need for mercy—in our world. One of the most moving stories came to us on October 6, 2006, when an armed man entered an Amish schoolhouse in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. He chased out the little boys and lined up the 10 little girls in front of the blackboard. He shot all of them and then killed himself. Five of the girls died. After the medics and police left, the families of the fallen came and carried their slain children home. They removed their bloody clothes and washed the bodies. They sat for a time and mourned their beloved children. After a while they walked to the home of the man who killed their children. They told his widow they forgave her husband for what he had done, and they consoled her for the loss of her spouse. They buried their anger before they buried their children. Amish Christians teach us that forgiveness is central. They believe in a real sense that God's forgiveness of themselves depends on their extending forgiveness to other people. That's what the mercy of God is all about. That mercy is why we celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday. (Rev. Alfred McBride, O.Praem: *Catholic Update* – March 2008).

# 3: 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 blue 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 had torn 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>)

# 4: St. Faustina and the Image of the Divine Mercy: St. Faustina of Poland is the well-known apostle of Divine Mercy. On the 30<sup>th</sup> 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!" (*Jezu ufam Tobie*). The rays streaming out have symbolic meaning: red for the Blood of Jesus, which is the life of souls and white for the Baptismal water 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 our need for God’s forgiveness of our 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 stresses the corporal acts of mercy practiced by the early Christian community before the Jews and the Romans started their persecutions. Practicing the sharing love, compassion and mercy of God as Jesus taught, this witnessing community derived its strength from community prayer, “the Breaking of the Bread” and the apostles’ teaching, read at the worship service. The second reading: After focusing on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, John reminds us that we practice spiritual works of mercy by obeying God’s commandments given in the Old Testament and especially Jesus’ commandment of loving others as He loves us – with selfless, sacrificial, agape love. Loving others as Jesus loves us also demands that we treat others with God’s mercy and compassion. 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 -- "*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 Divine Mercy message is one we can call to mind simply by remembering ABC: **A - Ask** for His Mercy. God wants us to approach Him in prayer constantly, repenting of our sins and asking Him to pour His mercy out upon us and upon the whole world. **B - Be merciful**. God wants us to receive His mercy and let it flow through us to others. He wants us to extend love and forgiveness to others just as He does to us. **C - Completely trust** in Jesus. God wants us to know that our reception of the graces of His mercy are dependent upon our trust. The more we trust in Jesus, the more we will receive. From <http://www.thedivinemercy.org/message/>]

**The first reading: Acts 4:32- 35 explained:** St. Luke's Acts of the Apostles gives us a summary of the life of the early Christian community before the Jews and the Romans began their persecutions. We get a glimpse of Divine Mercy in action in today's selection. The early Christians were so filled with the Holy Spirit that "no one claimed any of his possessions as his own." Rather, they "distributed to each according to his need." This was a community which practiced the sharing love, compassion and mercy taught by Jesus. It was a witnessing community of "one heart and one mind," bearing witness to the continued presence of the Risen Lord in their hearts and lives by holding everything in common and distributing to each one according to his or her needs. In a later portion of the Acts, we learn that the early Christian community derived its strength from community prayer, from "the Breaking of the Bread" and from listening to the teaching of the apostles. Owners of property were few among the early Christians, and the fact that they mixed lovingly at this level with the mass of common

folk was astonishing. This passage implies that the Christian community was assuming the nature of a family and beginning to overcome distinctions based on wealth. Also, the authority accorded to the apostles is worthy of note. They were beginning to take on the authority formerly held by Jewish priests.

**The second reading (1 John 5:1-6 explained):** While the first reading from Acts, calls our attention to the corporal works of mercy, the second reading, taken from St. John's first letter, focuses on both corporal and spiritual works of mercy. John urges our obedience to the commandments given by God, especially the commandment of love as clarified by Jesus. Loving others as Jesus loves us demands that we treat others with Jesus' mercy and compassion. John reminds us that everyone who claims to love God, especially one who believes that Jesus is the Christ, has to love all the others whom God has created. We are to conquer the world by putting our Faith in Jesus and in the Sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Eucharist, two sacraments of Divine Mercy that Jesus instituted. The "water" refers to Jesus' baptism, at the beginning of his ministry. The "blood" refers to Jesus' bloody death at the end of his ministry. Both refer to the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist.

**Exegesis of today's Gospel: The first part of today's Gospel (verses 19-23),** describes how Jesus entrusted to his 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, 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 in 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." The story of Thomas highlights the importance of signs (as we have seen all along in John), but also their limitations in terms of bringing people to Faith. Interestingly, there is never a mention of Thomas touching Jesus' wounds as he had said he needed to do; his encounter with the risen Lord is apparently sufficient to bring him to faith. 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). "This Gospel shows us that Faith comes in different ways to different people. The beloved disciple believes upon seeing the empty tomb (v. 8). Mary believes when the Lord calls her name (v. 16). the disciples must see the risen Lord (v. 20). Thomas says that he must touch the wounds (v. 25)—although that need evaporates once he sees the risen Christ (v. 28). People find various routes to faith." ([www.lectionary.org](http://www.lectionary.org)). Thomas uses the mind God has given him and says that he must have some proof before he can believe this incredible claim. Christian Faith is not just a mindless assent to certain beliefs without thinking—it has a solid basis in rationality, and this effort to explain and understand such claims is the basis of theological exploration, and of Christian philosophy (Dr. Murray).

**The unique profession of Faith:** Thomas, the “doubting” apostle, makes the great profession of faith, “*My Lord and my God.*” Thomas confesses Jesus in the very words (“My Lord and my God”) used by the Psalmist for Yahweh. Raymond Brown calls this “the supreme Christological pronouncement of the Fourth Gospel”. 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. The corporal works of mercy are feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, visiting the imprisoned, or ransoming the captive and burying the dead. The spiritual works of mercy include instructing, advising, consoling, forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently.

**2) Let us ask God for the Faith that culminates in self-surrender to God 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 community 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.** 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."