

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

“Divine Mercy Sunday”

Year C: Acts 5:12-16; Ps 118; Rev 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19; Jn 20:19-31

April 24, 2022

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Last Sunday, on Easter, we heard in the Gospel for Mass how St. Mary Magdalene and Ss. Peter and John found the tomb of Christ empty on Easter morning (cf. Jn 20:1-9). Today, on the Second Sunday of Easter, we hear in the Gospel how, later that day, in the evening, Jesus appeared to the Apostles in the Upper Room, where they were hiding. Today is the eighth day in the Octave of Easter, and so, we, as a Church, are still focusing on the day when Christ rose from the dead, and how His Apostles became aware that He was truly alive.

This Second Sunday of Easter is also known as “Divine Mercy Sunday,” because we hear in the Gospel how, when Jesus first appeared to the Apostles after rising from the dead, He breathed on them and said, “*Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.*” The first gift of the Risen Lord to His Church was the power and the authority to forgive sins. His first Easter gift to the Church was the gift of mercy, because the whole purpose of His death and Resurrection was to make possible the forgiveness of sins and allow God’s mercy to pour forth into the world.

And so, today, on Divine Mercy Sunday, the Church asks us to reflect on the mercy of God. The mercy of God, Pope Francis says, is like an inexhaustible spring of water that rises up from the depths of God’s being. “From the heart of the Trinity, from the depths of the mystery of God,” he says, “the great river of mercy wells up and overflows unceasingly. It is a spring that will never run dry, no matter how many people draw from it. Every time someone is in need, he or she can approach it, because the mercy of God never ends” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 25). This is why St. Paul says God is “*rich in mercy*” (Eph 2:4) – His mercy is inexhaustible – there is no limit to it, and it is always offered to those who need it.

We need to be careful, though, when we speak about there being no limits to God’s mercy. It’s true that there’s no limit to the *amount* of mercy that’s available to us. But there *is* a limit to *when* it’s available to us. Jesus was very clear, blunt and direct about this. He said, “*If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions*” (Mt 6:14-15). In other words, the only limit to God’s mercy is our own refusal to forgive others.

Pope Francis has also cautioned us about thinking wrongly about God's endless mercy. He said, "God is patient and offers us the possibility to change and make progress . . ." But, he said, "[t]he possibility of conversion is not unlimited; thus, it is necessary to seize it immediately; otherwise it might be lost forever." He said, "We can have great trust in God's mercy but without abusing it. We must not [allow God's mercy to] justify spiritual laziness," but rather, we should feel "the urgency of conversion" (*Angelus*, March 24, 2019).

And so, it's not possible, and it's not right, to contemplate God's mercy, without also contemplating our sins, which create our need for that mercy. It's not even logical to think of God's mercy, without thinking of our sins, because mercy, by definition, is God's desired response and cure for *sin*. *It just doesn't make sense* to focus on God's mercy, without also focusing on our sins. We can only appreciate God's mercy, if we consider our *need* for His Mercy, and it's when we desperately need God's mercy that we appreciate it the most.

A great reflection of God's mercy is found in the movie *Cinderella Man*. Hopefully, many of you have seen it. The movie is based on the true story of the champion boxer James Braddock, who was a Catholic, and who struggled to support his family during the Great Depression. In one very powerful scene, Braddock comes home from looking for work to find out that one of his young sons had stolen a stick of salami from the local butcher. Braddock very firmly orders his son to bring the salami back to the butcher, and Braddock goes with him to make sure he confesses and apologizes. As they're leaving the butcher's shop, the boy explains that he stole the salami, because he was afraid he would be sent away, like some of his friends were, if his family didn't have enough money to buy food.

Braddock stops his son on the sidewalk, leans down to him and says, "Just cuz things ain't easy, that don't give you the excuse to take what's not yours, now does it? That's stealing, right? And we don't steal. No matter what happens, we don't steal. Not ever. You got me?" He then makes his son promise that he will never steal again. "And I promise you," Braddock tells his son, "we will *never* send you away." When the boy starts to cry, Braddock picks him up in a big fatherly hug and says, "It's ok, kid. You got a little scared. I understand." And he carries him home in his arms.

When we acknowledge our sins with honesty and contrition, and resolve to avoid them in the future, it's like God the Father picks us up in His arms and says, "It's ok, I understand," and He restores our relationship with Him. That is the experience of His endless mercy that He wants all of us to have.