

## The Grace of Generosity

Homily for Divine Mercy Sunday  
April 22-23, 2017

Acts 2:42–47  
Psalm 118:2–4, 13–15, 22–24  
1 Peter 1:3–9  
John 20:19–31

This is Divine Mercy Sunday when we are invited in a particular way to mediate on the mercy of God manifested to us through the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is therefore fitting that on this Sunday we are given such a vivid picture of the mercy of Jesus in the Gospel reading.

Did you notice what our Lord instructs Thomas to do? After extending the Resurrection greeting of “Peace” a clear expression of the mercy of Jesus, he then invites the skeptical apostle to touch the place where the wounds of the crucifixion nails had pierced Jesus’ flesh. He wants Thomas to experience in a tactile way how Jesus offered his merciful body for the salvation of the world.

Then Jesus says:

***“Do not be faithless but believing”.***

Of course at the most fundamental level he means, believe in the fact that I have been raised from the dead. But at an even deeper level he is inviting Thomas to see and feel that he is the merciful saviour. It is at this point Thomas then says

***“My Lord and my God”.***

This is the earliest Creed expressed by an Apostle after the Resurrection. By referring to Jesus as God, he now understands more fully than he had previously that Jesus is the God of Israel. He is the one who addressed Moses at the Burning Bush. He is the God who spoke through the Prophets. He is the Great I Am. The God in and through whom all things exist.

But notice he also calls Jesus “my Lord”. This means that Thomas understands that he is to now govern his own life based on the teaching and example of Jesus, a life that is most fully captured by the word “mercy”. Everything that Jesus taught and everything he did is now ratified because of his Resurrection. Thomas understood that Jesus’ merciful life is the pattern by which all people can live a genuine human life because the Lord’s Resurrection affirmed that mercy does indeed triumph over judgement, at St James so beautifully expresses in his Letter.

Thomas called Jesus My Lord and My God and Jesus blessed him for this. But notice the beatitude he speaks to you and me.

***“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe***

What are the implications for us to see in Jesus the merciful Lord and God? Our readings give us a clear and explicit answer to this question. All three of them affirm that when we have been touched by and have touched the merciful Lord, what I want to call “The Grace of Generosity” is to be exhibited in how we live.

In all three readings this theme of “The Grace of Generosity” is evident.

In the Lesson from Acts we have a snap shot of how the earliest Christian community lived in light of the Resurrection. St Luke tells us that this was a community where mercy was expressed through the grace of generosity in practical kindness.

***<sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold <sup>35</sup> and laid it at the apostles’ feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need.***

This kind of mercy was an expression of practical care where the disciples realized that because of how they were now relating to the Resurrected Christ, this affected the way they were relate to each other. They understood that in loving one another they were loving the risen Lord. They recognized the Resurrected Christ in the other and so realized that it was imperative they extend practical mercy to the other. Here the grace of generosity was expressed through acts of practical kindness.

St Peter in his Epistle also expresses this theme of the grace of generosity through practical theology. Listen to how mercy is to shape our lives:

***By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead***

How does this living hope influence how we live in the present? Even though we go through trials that are like a refining fire we are generous in our love towards Jesus because of his Divine Mercy towards us:

***Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. <sup>9</sup> As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls.***

Christians have a perspective on life that allows us to live confidently because the outcome of placing our faith in the mercy of Jesus Christ is the salvation of our souls.

This then brings us to the Gospel where we have a clear statement of how we appropriate the grace of generosity in our own lives -through practical confession. Because we are all influenced by the world and its values, there are times when we do not reflect the family likeness of Jesus. Jesus knew that this would be the case and so he says:

***“Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”***

Here Jesus invites all of us to remember that he is the merciful saviour who knows that as we continue on our pilgrimage through this world we will need to have a place where we can go to

make present Jesus' mercy in our own lives. He has given us a sacrament of mercy for this very reason. What a grace it is to take advantage of Confession. For we are all like Thomas, vacillating in our commitment, at times struggling with faith, hope and love and so in need of Jesus' ongoing mercy.

On this Sunday through the grace of generosity made available to us through the Church we can receive an indulgence.

What is an indulgence?

An indulgence is a way in which the Church, with the power of the Keys which Our Lord gave to St. Peter and his successors, joins our good works to the merits of the saints in Paradise and to Our Lord's own sacrifice. Like a parent who supplements a child's allowance to pay for a broken window, the spiritual treasury of the saints is opened up for us through the Church's loving ministry. In this way, the holiness of the blessed profits and heals us in ways that go far beyond the damage that our sins have caused. Just as the parent's act in paying the damages for the child should make the child more aware of his parents' love and the requirements of justice and virtue, so the Church's gift of indulgences is meant to be a personal experience of the solidarity of love and grace; they are not magic or "automatic forgiveness."

The Church distinguishes between partial and plenary indulgences. A plenary indulgence removes all the temporal punishment due to sin, while a partial indulgence removes only part of the debt. The Church makes this distinction because some of our good acts have the potential to be "life-changing" acts of conversion, while others represent smaller but still very important aspects of the journey of conversion. As the Church unites our acts and efforts to the grace of Jesus and the works and merits of the saints, she calls us to persevere day by day in our path to holiness.

Both forms of indulgence are gifts of transforming love. We can obtain them for ourselves or for the sake of the faithful departed, who are completing their final purification in Purgatory. (We can offer up an indulgenced good work on behalf of a particular soul, but it is always up to God to determine when and how it will be applied.)

To receive an indulgence, one must be in the state of grace, through a good sacramental Confession and receive Holy Communion, preferably on the day when the indulgenced work is performed. Union with Jesus through grace and the Church's sacraments is the foundation of all growth in holiness. We must turn away from sin before we can eliminate the consequences of our sins. At the heart of this sacrament is not the idea of the Church's get out of purgatory free card, but the soul's true desire to be joined ever more fully to his or her Lord. To truly love Jesus as St. Peter expresses in his letter.

To those who approach this day with this heartfelt desire for union with Jesus, he promises through St. Faustina:

***“The soul that will go to Confession and receives Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment. On that day all the divine floodgates through which graces flow are opened.”<sup>1</sup>***

Here is the beautiful gift. As we make use of the sacrament of practical confession and receive the indulgence from the Church’s treasury then in turn the practical theology of a living hope and the practical kindness stated in the Acts reading will more fully shape us to live as people of Divine Mercy.

With Thomas we will say, “Yes it is true Jesus. You are my Lord and my God.”

Beloved we are blessed to be children in this universal family of Mercy. And because of this may my life, may your lives, may our lives embody Divine Mercy through practical kindness, practical theology and practical confession.

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<sup>1</sup> The Diary of St. Faustina, entry 699