

2nd Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday, Year B

On April 30, 2000, His Holiness John Paul II, in response to the wishes of the Christian faithful, declared that the “the Second Sunday of Easter henceforth throughout the Church will also be called Divine Mercy Sunday.” The desire for this celebration was expressed by Our Lord to Saint Faustina as can be found in her Diary (CCC 699). “My daughter, tell the whole world about My inconceivable mercy. I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of My tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fount of My mercy. The soul that will go to Confession, and receive Holy Communion on this day shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment...”¹⁸

Acts 4:32-35

32The community of believers This community which was presided over by Peter and the other Apostles, was the entire Church of Jesus Christ. Today the Roman Catholic Church has a membership of over one billion people which is about half of the estimated 2.1 billion Christians worldwide.³ **was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common.** All Christians should be ready and eager to come to the help of the needy and of their neighbors in want. A Christian is a steward of the Lord’s goods.¹ (CCC 952)

33With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all. In 1 Cor. 15:5-6 it says that after Christ rose from the dead “he was seen by Cephas (Peter), then by the Twelve. After that he was seen by 500 brothers at once, most of whom are still alive.” So, many of the people in this early community had PERSONALLY seen the risen Christ! That had to have a riveting effect on the community! On top of that, the apostles manifested “great power” which means miracles and wonders. It enabled them to preach, to bear witness to Jesus, to forgive sins and to exercise the charismatic gifts listed in 1 Cor. of wisdom in discourse, power to express knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues and the interpretation of tongues! No wonder they were fired up!

34There was no needy person among them, This is an allusion to Deut. 15:4 “When the Lord God blesses you in your land, there will be no needy person among you.” **for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale,** This sharing was not required. It was utterly spontaneous. (Acts 5:3-4) At this point in time, the entire Church is in Jerusalem – which is doomed to destruction because of the infidelity of the Chosen People of the Old Covenant. They, like all smart investors, sell their property in anticipation of the destruction and chaos which surely will come (and did come in A.D. 70).¹⁸

35and put them at the feet of the apostles, To lay something at one’s feet is the body language that acknowledges the power and authority of the apostles who are now placed at the center of the community collection and by implication, the dispersal of goods as well.⁴ **and they were distributed to each according to need.** This is a snapshot of community life in the early Jerusalem Church. It is characterized by a selfless concern for all, an even distribution of goods, and a complete trust in the oversight of the apostles. In every aspect of life, the earliest believers were united as a family: they learned together, lived together, ate together, worshiped together, and prayed together.² By the time A.D.70 came around, they had all apparently evacuated the city and resettled in the village of Pella in the mountains across the Jordan as there is no record of even one Christian perishing, although over a million Jews died in the siege of Jerusalem.¹⁸

1 John 5:1-6

This beautiful letter was written by the Apostle John in his old age to his spiritual “children”, Christians who were not beginners but already mature in their faith. Like his Gospel, this letter is profound, yet simple. The fundamental theme is that John wants us to be certain and assured of our relationship with God.⁶ St. Jerome tells us that when John was a very old man his only message was, “little children, love one another.” When his disciples asked him why he was always saying the same thing he always answered “My children, this is what the Lord commands; if we do this, nothing else is necessary.”¹⁸

The fifth chapter is a summary of the entire letter, focusing on faith in Jesus Christ and the confidence that faith gives. In our selection, St. John points to some consequences of faith: he who believes in Christ is a child of God, (v.1) he loves God and men who are his brothers, (v.2) he keeps the commandments (v.3) and shares in Christ’s victory over the world (vv. 4-5).⁶

Beloved:

1Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God, This is covenant imagery. If he is begotten, he is one of his own kind, from the same father. If you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed one, your older brother, then you are also part of God’s family.¹⁸ **and everyone who loves the Father loves also the one begotten by him.** Christian fraternity is a consequence of this divine connection.⁵ John sees the love of God and love of man as inseparable parts of the same experience.¹¹

2In this way we know that we love the children of God John speaks of the “children of God” rather than “the brethren” because he wants to stress that this love is a dimension of the love of God.⁹ **when we love God and obey his commandments.** Obedience is the proof of love of God. The other proof of the love of God consists in the love of one’s brethren as was stated in 4:20 *“If anyone says, ‘My love is fixed on God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. One who has no love for the brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen.”* It is no less true that the love of God that consists in obedience to his commandments is a sign that one loves his brothers.⁹

3For the love of God is this, that we keep his commandments. The sign of love is the obedience to the commandments.⁹ John reminds us that law and love are always found together. Whenever one is neglected the other withers.⁷ **And his commandments are not burdensome,** Keeping the commandments is possible because we have overcome the hostile forces of “the world” through Baptism where the power of sin and evil was defeated when we died with Christ and rose to new life, free from Satan’s power.¹⁰ Jesus himself said in Mt. 11:30, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

4for whoever is begotten by God conquers the world. In this passage the word “world” means everything opposed to the redemptive work of Christ and the salvation of man that flows from it.⁵ The Christian is possessed of the power to overcome all hostile forces that would prevent his obedience to God’s commandments.⁹ **And the victory that conquers the world is our faith.** The SOURCE of the power whereby we can overcome all hostile forces is our faith in Jesus Christ.⁹

5Who indeed is the victor over the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. Once we accept Jesus into our lives we are never alone and once we are baptized into his body, we are not only empowered, we also have the company of the rest of God’s children. It is the fact of experience that goodness is easier in the company of good people.¹¹

⁶This is the one who came through water and blood, Jesus was sent to us from God through water (his baptism) and through blood (his crucifixion and death).⁸ **Jesus Christ, not by water alone, but by water and blood. The Spirit is the one that testifies, and the Spirit is truth.** The Spirit was present at Jesus' baptism and continues to witness to the work achieved through Christ by his presence in the Church.⁹ This reference to the testimony of the Spirit suggests the three sacraments of initiation: Baptism (water), Confirmation (Spirit) and Eucharist (Blood). This is how our faith that overcomes the world is celebrated.¹⁰

John 20:19-31

*In this Gospel St. John writes from the point of view of Jesus fulfilling OT prophecies. He seeks to strengthen the faith of the early Church. In his account of the resurrected Lord, he shows how the necessary tools to continue his work were passed on.*¹⁸

¹⁹On the evening of that first day of the week, (Easter Sunday in the evening) when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst There are four qualities of Christ's risen body: *subtlety* whereby Jesus was able to pass through closed doors, *impassibility* which means immunity from death and pain, *agility* which describes his ability to move through space with the speed of thought, and *clarity* or refulgent beauty of the soul manifested in the body as when Jesus was transfigured on Mt. Tabor.¹² **and said to them, "Peace be with you."** This traditional Hebrew greeting does not refer to worldly peace, which is often procured by violence and is always unstable, but a spiritual serenity that comforts us regardless of our outward circumstances.¹³

²⁰When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The point is that Jesus is raised not simply with *a* body, but with the *same* body that was crucified and died only days earlier.¹³ He carries these marks of his earthly sacrifice with him¹ (CCC 645) even when he ascends into heaven. (Rev. 5:6) **The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.**

²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Henceforth the Apostles are ambassadors of Christ as he is the ambassador of the Father. In this mission the bishops are the successors of the Apostles in both their consecration and their mission and in a subordinate degree to their coworkers, the priests.¹⁴ Every Bishop can trace his consecration back to one of the Apostles.

²²And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. This anticipates the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost, which will take place 50 days later. John uses an expression that recurs in the Old Testament in Gen. 2:7 where the Lord breathes life into Adam; in 1 Kings 17:21 where Elijah resuscitated a boy with his breath; and in Ezek. 37:9 where God raises an army of corpses to new life by the breath of the Spirit.¹⁵

²³Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." Jesus' ministry of mercy and reconciliation will continue through the Apostles. The power to "forgive and retain" sins in the name of Jesus is elsewhere described as the authority to "bind and loose." This episode is connected with the institution of the Sacrament of Reconciliation by which Christ distributes divine forgiveness to the world through the successors of the Apostles (bishops) and their assistants (priests).¹⁵ The consensus of all the Fathers of the Church has always acknowledged that by this action so sublime and words so clear the power of forgiving and retaining sins was given to the Apostles and their lawful successors for reconciling the faithful who have fallen after Baptism. In the encyclical "Mystici Corporis" the faithful are encouraged to go to frequent

confession for “by this means we grow in a true knowledge of ourselves and in Christian humility, bad habits are uprooted, spiritual negligence and apathy are prevented, the conscience is purified and the will strengthened, salutary spiritual direction is obtained, and grace is increased by the efficacy of the sacrament itself.”¹⁴

²⁴Thomas, called Didymus, “Didymus” means “twin” even though no brother is ever mentioned, was as hard-headed as Peter himself, cautious, steady, unimaginative, yet as time and grace were to show, he was utterly relentless in pursuit of a missionary goal and a man of great courage. He eventually went to India and the Far East preaching the Gospel and establishing the Catholic Church in that area. He was killed by stab wounds in 72 A.D.¹⁵ one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

²⁵So the other disciples said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” The Second Sunday of Easter could be called Thomas’ Easter. He represents that part of us which is relentlessly asking for proof, for confirmation.⁷

²⁷Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.” The wound in his side must have been very large as Thomas was told to put his hand into it and also the wounds in his hands for Thomas was told to substitute a finger for a nail.¹⁶

²⁸Thomas answered and said to him, “My Lord and my God!” He who was the last to believe was the first to make the full confession of the Divinity of the Risen Savior.¹⁶ This act of faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ has become a common prayer used as an act of faith in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Eucharist.¹⁴

²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.” This means us! It refers to those of us who confess with our soul Him whom we have not seen in the flesh...provided we live in accordance with the faith, for only he truly believes who practices what he believes.¹⁴

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs Everything in Jesus’ life was a sign of his mystery. His deeds, miracles, and words all revealed that the whole fullness of God dwells in him.¹ (CCC 515) in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book.

³¹But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name. It is quite clear that the gospels never set out to give a full account of the life of Jesus. They do not follow him from day to day from hour to hour. The gospels are selective. They give us, not an exhaustive account of everything that Jesus said or did, but a selection of typical incidents, which show what he was like and the kind of things he was always doing. Further, it is quite clear that the gospels were not meant to be biographies of Jesus; they are meant to be appeals to take Jesus as Savior, Master and Lord. Their aim was not to give information, but to give life. Their aim is to paint such a picture of Jesus that the reader will be bound to see that the person who could speak and teach and act and heal like this can be none other than the Messiah and the Son of God; and that in that belief he might find the secret of real life.¹⁷

the Online Encyclopedia, (4) "The Acts of the Apostles" by Luke Timothy Johnson, (5) "The Navarre Bible: Catholic Epistles," (6) "You Can Understand The Bible" by Peter Kreeft, (7) The Commentary Notes of Tim Gray, (8) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2005" by Aelred R. Rosser, (9) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (10) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1997" by Lawrence E. Mick, (11) "The Letters Of John And Jude" by William Barclay, (12) "Catholic Replies 2" by James J. Drummey, (13) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John" With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (14) "The Navarre Bible: St. John," (15) "The Founding of Christendom" by Warren H. Carroll, (16) "Life Of Christ" by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, (17) "The Gospel Of John" by William Barclay and (18) The St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Online Founded By Dr. Scott Hahn.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.