

2nd Sunday of Easter: Divine Mercy Sunday

Acts 2:42-47

The readings for the Fifty Days of the Easter season replace the Old Testament selection with one from the Acts of the Apostles.⁵ The book of Acts continues the Gospel of Luke and was probably written in Rome sometime between 62 and 70 A.D.⁵

42They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles This was the instruction normally given to new converts. (Some 3,000 had been baptized by nightfall on Pentecost Sunday!) This was not the proclamation of the Gospel to non-Christians, but a type of lesson aimed at explaining the Christian meaning of the Old Testament and the basic truths of the new faith.³

and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread For 2000 years the Catholic Church — from the voices of the early Christians to the recent teachings of Vatican II and the Catechism — has CONSISTENTLY taught Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist and the centrality of the Eucharist in the Christian life.² **and to the prayers.** These prayers were probably the Jewish daily prayers.⁵ The Didache, which is a compilation of the teachings of the Apostles, also recommends that the "Our Father" be prayed three times a day.⁶

43Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Luke shows the church continuing the miracles of Jesus as it continues his mission.⁵

44All who believed were together The Catechism tells us that faith is a treasure, which is enriched by being shared.⁹ (CCC 949) This ideal first community enjoyed table-fellowship with those who had been at table with Jesus himself!⁴ **and had all things in common;**

45they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. We know from Acts 5:4 that this was a voluntary action.

46Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area Jesus had gone up to the Temple as the privileged place of encounter with God. For him, the Temple was the dwelling of his Father, a house of prayer. After his Resurrection his apostles retained their reverence for the Temple.⁹ (CCC 584) For about the first nine years the Church was composed solely of Jewish Christians who carefully observed the full Mosaic Law.¹⁰

Another consideration was that Jesus often taught in the Temple and it remained a missionary forum for the early Christians.⁴ **and to breaking bread in their homes.**

Archaeologists have found Eucharistic vessels that people used to bring home pieces of the consecrated bread. The custom of celebrating Mass during the week (between Sundays) did not emerge until the fourth century or so. When people left Mass on Sunday, they brought Eucharistic bread home to receive the Lord during the week, to stay linked to the Church's praise of God and to be strengthened physically and spiritually until the gathering again on the following Sunday.¹ The early Church met in private homes for financial reasons as well as to avoid persecution. It was not until the third century that buildings designed solely for liturgical purposes began to be erected.³

⁴⁷They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. It was said of these early believers: “Behold these Christians! How they love one another!”⁷ **And every day the Lord added to their number** Because Christ is the true builder of the Church, he is credited with her astonishingly rapid growth.⁸ **those who were being saved.** 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.⁸

1 Peter 1:3-9

*This letter was written from Rome in early 64 AD by St. Peter the Apostle to the churches in Asia Minor to strengthen and encourage them. After the traditional greeting, this selection begins with a baptismal hymn which is followed by Peter’s interpretation of its meaning.*⁷

³**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth** When a man becomes a Christian, there comes into his life a change so radical and so decisive that he can only be said to be born again. He has become so different and life has become so different that the only thing that can be said is that life has begun all over again.¹² We are given this new birth by Baptism.²¹ **to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,** There are actually two parts to this mystery: by his death, Christ frees us from sin and by his Resurrection, he opens up for us the way to a new life.⁹ (CCC 654) It is baptism that allows us to share in this new life.⁴

⁴**to an inheritance that is imperishable** (This means that it is eternal), undefiled (It contains no evil), **and unfading** (It will never grow old,) **kept in heaven for you** Canaan became the “inheritance” of Israel but the Christian inheritance is not earthly: it cannot be ravaged by war, defiled by enemies or faded by time. It is heavenly.⁴

⁵**who by the power of God are safeguarded through faith,** The security of the Christian inheritance is like that of a land with strong military protection. It is the very power of God, the same power that raised up Jesus and endowed him with the glory, that brings this security.⁴ **to a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the final time.** Salvation, the goal of Christian faith, is presented as a future event. Not once saved, always saved, but a hope for eternal salvation.²¹ This is the end of the hymn and the next verse begins the commentary.

⁶**In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials,** It is good to suffer trials because eternal joys cannot be obtained EXCEPT through the afflictions and sorrows of this passing world. When one receives an eternal reward, the afflictions of this world—which appear so heavy and bitter now—will seem then to have been very short-lived and slight.¹¹ Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his encyclical, Spe Salvi: “Certainly we must do whatever we can to reduce suffering, however, it is not by side-stepping or fleeing from suffering that we are healed, but rather by our capacity for accepting it, maturing through it, and finding meaning through union with Christ who suffered with infinite love.”²⁰

7so that the genuineness (constancy or fidelity) of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, Gold is purified by fire but remains perishable; the faith of Christians, tested by suffering, endures.⁵ may prove to be for That is, it may result in: praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. This refers to the end of the world when Jesus comes as Judge.⁴ St. Augustine teaches that “if I experience pain, relief will come in due course. If I am offered tribulation, it will serve for my purification. Does gold shine in the craftsman’s furnace? It will shine later when it is part of the jewelry. But, for the time being, it puts up with being in the fire because when it sheds its impurities, it will acquire its brilliant shine.”¹¹

8Although you have not seen him you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, This verse sets the stage for the story of Thomas in the gospel today. you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy,

9as you attain the goal of your faith, which is: the salvation of your souls.

John 20:19-31

19On the evening of that first day of the week, The evening of Easter Sunday. when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, The disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were terribly frightened that the soldiers were going to come and arrest them and, possibly, even put them to death.¹⁵ John also wants to point out that there are no locks capable of hindering the presence of Christ.⁷ Jesus came and stood in their midst One of the qualities of Christ’s resurrected body is that it is not bound by matter and he is able to pass through the wall of the room with the door locked. This is called “subtlety.”¹⁹ and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

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. He carries these marks of his earthly sacrifice with him even when he ascends into heaven.¹³ Here and in verse 27 are the only explicit references from the Gospels that Jesus was nailed rather than tied to the cross.²¹ The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

21Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. This is not 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 As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Here Christ transferred his own mission to the Apostles and through them to their successors, the bishops. All priests in the Catholic Church are ordained by bishops who can trace their lineage of ordination back to the Apostles!¹⁶

22And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. God breathes on man only twice in all of Scripture—once in Genesis when He breathes the breath of life into Adam, through whom we were all given life, and again here,

at the completion of the New Creation, when He breathes on the Apostles through whom we all attain new life in Christ.¹⁶

23 Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” The Church has always understood that Jesus Christ here conferred on the Apostles authority to FORGIVE sins, a power which is exercised in the sacrament of Penance. The consensus of ALL THE CHURCH FATHERS has always acknowledged that here Jesus “by this action so sublime and words so clear” gave to the Apostles and their lawful successors the power of forgiving and retaining sins for the purpose of reconciling the faithful who have fallen into sin after Baptism. Before they could exercise this power over souls, they obviously needed to hear sins confessed aloud (or denounced publicly). Otherwise, they could not know what to bind or loose.¹³ The Popes have consistently recommended Christians to have regular recourse to this sacrament.¹⁸ The first generation of Christians made confession and so did every generation thereafter. The mention of confession appears twice in the Didache, which is a compilation of the teachings of the apostles that was written around 48 AD. St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, wrote around 107 AD that “The mark of the Christian who perseveres is faithfulness to confession.”¹⁷

24 Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The designation of “the Twelve” remains even though one of them has defected. Matthias will be selected by lot to replace Judas in 40 days (Acts 1:16ff)

25 So 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.”

26 Now a week later This appearance also takes place on a Sunday. After Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday, it became the special day of Christian assembly and liturgy.⁴ 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.”

27 Then 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.”

28 Thomas answered and said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Faith has to do with things which are not seen, for that which is seen is no longer the object of faith, but rather of experience. Thomas saw one thing and believed another: he saw the man, Jesus, but he RECOGNIZED him as God whom he could not see.¹⁴ It is interesting that the “doubter” is the one who made the most complete affirmation of Christ’s nature to be found on the lips of anyone in the Gospel. This is the same combination of titles that was used to translate the name of the God of Israel in the Old Testament.⁴

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 is sometimes called the “9th Beatitude” and is the only one mentioned in John. This is addressed to all Christians of all times and that includes us!⁴

³⁰Now, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. In John 21:25 it says that “There are still many other things that Jesus did, yet if they were written about in detail, I doubt there would be room enough in the entire world to hold the books to record them.”

³¹But these are written that you may come to believe This means not only to COME to belief but also to GROW in faith.⁴ that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 2005” by Martin Connell, (2) “Catholic For A Reason: The Heart of the Home, Jesus in the Eucharist,” by Edward P. Sri, (3) “The Navarre Bible: Acts Of The Apostles,” (4) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (5) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1999” by Lawrence E. Mick, (6) “The Apostolic Fathers” edited by J.B. Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer, (7) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2002” by Aelred R. Rosser, (8) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles” with commentary and notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (9) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (10) “The Founding of Christendom” by Warren H. Carroll, (11) “The Navarre Bible: Catholic Epistles,” (12) “The Letters of James and Peter” by William Barclay, (13) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John” by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (14) “The Navarre Bible: St. John,” (15) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (16) “Bible Basics” by Steve Kellmeyer, (17) “Lord Have Mercy” by Scott Hahn, (18) “The Gospel of St. John, A Catholic Bible Study” by Stephen K. Ray, (19) “Catholic Replies 2” by James J. Drummey, (20) Encyclical, “Spe Salvi” by Pope Benedict XVI, and (21) The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn.

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