

April 16, 2023

2nd Sunday of Easter – Sunday of Divine Mercy

John 20:19-31

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 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 nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

Now 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." 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." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

Background:

The Gospel for this second Sunday of Easter comes from John's Gospel. Being the last Gospel written, it presents the life of Jesus in a way that addresses the struggles and questions of the early Christians that were not present for the events as presented in the other Gospels. One of those concerns was how new believers could be expected to believe without any experience of the living person of Jesus, or without even the testimony of anyone who had experience of Jesus, especially the resurrected Jesus. That issue is in the background as John includes the risen Jesus' first encounter with the disciples, and the second a week later with Thomas among them, in the Gospel text for this Second Sunday of Easter.

Unlike the other Gospels, John's Gospel does not contain a Last Supper/Passover account. Instead, John precedes the passion and death of Jesus with a farewell address. As part of this address, Jesus says, "My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. You heard me tell you, 'I am going away and I will come back to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father; for the Father is greater than I." (John 14:27-28) Later in that discourse Jesus again addresses the disciples, "You also are now in anguish. But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. On that day you will not question me about anything." (John 16:22-23a) In the text for this Sunday, John describes how Jesus has fulfilled what he said in that farewell address.

The Gospel text is composed of two almost identical appearances of the risen Lord. Both appearances take place on the first day of the week. The disciples are gathered, the doors are locked, Jesus appears in their midst, he greets them with the greeting of peace, and he shows them the wounds of the crucifixion. The repetition of these details draws attention to the ways the two appearances are different. Perhaps the most noticeable difference is the absence of Thomas in the first appearance. When he is told by the others that Jesus has appeared to them, he refuses to accept their testimony. He states that even if the others have seen the risen Jesus, he will not believe unless he can not only see but touch the wounds. Thus, the second difference in the two appearances is that in the second one, Thomas is invited by Jesus not only to see the wounds but to also touch and probe the wounds

of the crucifixion. The third difference is the kind of response the disciples and Thomas have to the presence of the risen Christ. In the first account, the disciples are filled with joy. In the second appearance, Thomas responds with a statement of faith in Jesus as his Lord and his God. The last difference is in the way the appearance impacts those beyond the event itself. In the first incident, Jesus commissions the disciples to be instruments of God's forgiveness. In the second appearance, Jesus refers to those who believe—those who have not had the kind of witness experience that Thomas and the other disciples have had and still believe--Jesus calls them blessed.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is critical of those who seek some sign as proof of his authority to cast out a demon, do some work that is forbidden on the Sabbath, or forgive sins. But here, in order to help Thomas to believe, he returns to the disciples who are still gathered in a locked room, speaks to them a greeting of peace, and invites Thomas to touch not just his body, but the nail marks and the wound in his side too, so that he will believe.

Reflection Questions:

1. What does the act of locking doors mean? What is it saying about the person locking doors, our society, and our need to feel safe?
2. Why do you think Thomas was not with the other disciples when Jesus first appeared to them?
3. What are some of the things that might have been going on within Thomas when he told them that he would never believe unless he probed the marks of the crucifixion for himself?
4. What do you think the week between these two appearances of Jesus was like for Thomas, and for the disciples?
5. Are you surprised that Thomas was still with the disciples after his statement of disbelief in their testimony?
6. Since Jesus had appeared to the disciples earlier, why do you think they were still gathered behind a locked door at the time of the second appearance?
7. What do you think would have happened if the disciples had told Thomas that if he was not going to accept their testimony, he was no longer welcome to gather with them?
8. Can you imagine the first time you come face to face with God and the first thing you hear God say to you is "Peace be with you!" What would be your reaction to that greeting?
9. Have you ever talked openly with God about any time you have had doubts or fears? Why?
10. Can you take some time to talk with God openly of your need for peace, Jesus's response to Thomas in this Gospel, or whatever arose within you from reading this Gospel?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for April 16th, the second Sunday of Easter, which is also Divine Mercy Sunday. In the Gospel from John, Jesus appears twice to the disciples, though the door is locked both times. Thomas, who was not with them the first time, doubts it when they tell him. The second time, Jesus shows Thomas his wounds, adding, "Blessed are those who have not seen, and have believed." The other readings also have references to gatherings, wonders, and believing. In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, "Every day they devoted themselves to meeting in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. All who believed were together. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done." Psalm 118 rejoices, "By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes." In the second reading, Peter writes in his first letter, "Although you do not see him now yet believe in him, rejoice as you attain the salvation of your souls." May the joy of Easter remain with you! May you recognize God in the people you live and work and interact with, and may they recognize Him in you.

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!

Excerpts from the readings for April 16, 2023, the Second Sunday of Easter (Sunday of Divine Mercy)

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together; they would sell their possessions and divide them according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his love is everlasting.

Let the house of Israel say, "His mercy endures forever."

Let those who fear the Lord say, "His mercy endures forever."

I was hard pressed and was falling, but the Lord helped me.

My strength and my courage is the Lord, and he has been my savior.

The joyful shout of victory in the tents of the just:

The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes.

This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, kept for you who are safeguarded through faith, to a salvation that is to be revealed in the final time. In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Although you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable joy, as you attain the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." He showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." He breathed on them and said, "Receive

the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." Thomas was not with them when Jesus came. So the others said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said, "Unless I put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and said, "Peace be with you." He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side; do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

Excerpts from Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24; 1 Peter 1:3-9; and John 20:19-31