

April 7, 2024

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 an issue when the other Gospels were being written. One of those concerns was how new believers could be expected to believe without any experience of the living person of Jesus, or even the testimony of anyone who had personally witnessed the resurrected Jesus. That issue is in the background as John includes the disciples' encounter with the risen Lord.

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. 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, but have not had the firsthand experience that Thomas and the 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. (2:18; 4:48; 6:2; 6:26) But here, in order to help Thomas 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, so that he will believe.

Either this Gospel text can be a source of meditation in its entirety, or, if time permits, you may consider meditation on the three sections separately.

Reflection Questions:

1. What is your experience of living with fear? Have there been times when you feared for your life? Is fear of what might happen part of your daily life pattern?
2. Why do you think the disciples were gathered in fear?
3. What are some of the reasons that Thomas was not with the other disciples when Jesus first appeared to them?
4. How do you think Thomas felt when he learned that Jesus had appeared to the disciples without him being present?
5. How do you think the disciples might have felt about Thomas not being with them?
6. What do you think the week between the appearances of Jesus was like for Thomas, and for the disciples?
7. Are you surprised that Thomas is still with the disciples after his statement of disbelief in their testimony? What does it say to you about Thomas and the disciples that they are associating with one another?
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. Can you talk with God about any time you have had doubts or fears, or your own attitude toward those who have left the Church or have doubts and fears?

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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Excerpts from the readings for April 7, 2024, the Second Sunday of Easter (Sunday of Divine Mercy)

The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all.

There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need.

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.

Beloved: Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God, and everyone who loves the Father loves also the one begotten by him. In this way we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments. For the love of God is this, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whoever is begotten by God conquers the world. And the victory that conquers the world is our faith.

Who indeed is the victor over the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is the one who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by water alone, but by water and blood. The Spirit is the one that testifies, and the Spirit is truth.

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 4:32-35; Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24; 1 John 5:1-6; and John 20:19-31

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for April 7th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. This is the Second Sunday of Easter, and also Divine Mercy Sunday. In the Gospel from John, there are two appearances by Jesus to those assembled with the disciples in the locked upper room. The first is on the evening of the day he rose from the dead. Jesus comes into their midst, shows them his wounds, and says "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Breathing on them, he adds, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them." A week later, he comes the second time into their midst in the locked room, and this time he shows his wounds to Thomas, who was not present during the previous appearance. Thomas responds, "My Lord and my God," upon which Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

The other readings also have references to mercy, and that the victor who conquers the world does so by faith, by believing. In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the community of believers share all they have in common, and no one is needy. Those who owned property sold it and brought the proceeds to the apostles. These were distributed to each according to their need. Psalm 118 exclaims: "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his mercy endures forever." In the second reading, from his first letter, John writes, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God. Whoever is begotten by God conquers the world. We love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments, and the commandments are not burdensome. The victor over the world is the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

Mercy and believing share equally in emphasis on this day. That's the Lord's mercy--Divine Mercy--, and believing in Jesus as the Christ and as the Son of God. The end of the second reading instructs that Jesus the Christ came through water and blood, not by water alone, but by water and blood--baptism and crucifixion. And the Spirit testifies, the Spirit who is truth. His mercy is ours, those of us who believe. With Jesus, we conquer. "Through this belief you may have life in his name." "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Joe

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

Not with their own swords did they conquer the land,

nor did their own arms bring victory;

It was your right hand, your own arm,

the light of your face, for you favored them.

Psalm 44:4