

2nd Sunday of Easter - A
Acts of the Apostles 2:42-47;
I Peter 1:3-9;
John 20:19-31
Little Flower - 4/23/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Second Sunday of Easter, the Octave Day of Easter. In the Church, octaves continue the celebration of major feasts for eight days straight. In the pre-Vatican II Liturgy, the Sunday after Easter was called Low Sunday to distinguish the end from the beginning of the eight-day celebration. Today the Second Sunday of Easter is called the Sunday of Divine Mercy or Divine Mercy Sunday. Every year the Gospel on this Sunday tells the story of Jesus' institution of the sacrament of reconciliation. Today's Liturgy has three primary themes.

When I was in school, we were taught a definition of sacrament that I have never forgotten: "A Sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace." What this means is that sacraments are signs that are more than signs: they actually cause or bring about what they signify. Of course, we all know that there are seven sacraments.

However, if we broaden the meaning of the word *sacrament*, we can say that Jesus Himself is the sacrament of God, the Church is the sacrament of Jesus, and Jesus instituted the seven sacraments. Pope Francis has consistently argued that mercy is the primary attribute of God. Therefore, we can argue that Jesus is the sacrament of God's mercy, the Church is the sacrament of Jesus' mercy, and Jesus instituted the sacrament of mercy, the sacrament of reconciliation.

There can be no question that Jesus is the sacrament of God's mercy. As Paul wrote to the Romans, "*But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us*" [Rom. 5:8]. In other words, Christ's death on the cross is the perfect sign of God's mercy, but since his death on the cross actually saved us, he is the perfect sacrament of God's mercy. The Church as a community and we as individuals, then, are called to be sacraments of Jesus' mercy. As a community and as individuals, we are called to be as welcoming, non-judging, and forgiving as Jesus himself was. Finally, Jesus gave us the sacrament of reconciliation as a great gift, not a burden.

The second theme is faith. When the other apostles told Thomas that they had seen Jesus, he said he would not believe unless he could see and put his finger into the nailmarks in his hands and put his hand into his side. When Jesus appeared a week later, he invited Thomas to do exactly that. Thomas responded, "*My Lord and my God,*" to which Jesus responded, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.*"

On the other hand, St. Peter praises his readers for believing in and loving Jesus even without seeing him: "*Although you have not seen him you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of (your) faith, the salvation of your souls.*" St. Peter reminds us that genuine faith is more precious than gold tested by fire. He also makes the point that the goal of faith is the salvation of our souls, again emphasizing a theme we have been hearing frequently: the life Jesus gives is not life limited to this world. The life Jesus gives is life for eternity.

My brothers and sisters, the third theme of today's readings is community. Today's reading from Acts describes the early Christian community: "*They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.*" This reading from Acts once again reminds us that the Christianity of Jesus is a Christianity of church or community. As important as personal faith in Jesus is, as important as personal prayer is, as important as living a good life is, these are not enough. Today's reading from Acts stresses the importance of community faith and community prayer, the importance of the breaking of the bread, which is another name for Eucharist, and the importance of serving one another and sharing with one another within the community.