

2nd Sunday of Easter - B
Acts 4:32-35 ;
I John 5:1-6;
John 20:19-31
Little Flower - 4/8/18

My Brothers and Sisters,

In the year 2000, Pope John Paul II decreed that throughout the world the Second Sunday of Easter would receive the title *Divine Mercy Sunday*. Every year on this Sunday, the Gospel recounts Jesus' institution of the sacrament of reconciliation. Although today's Gospel recounts Jesus' institution of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, its larger message is to remind us that Jesus is God's mercy incarnate.

Pope Francis consistently reminds us that mercy is the quality most proper to God. Therefore, Jesus, the Son of God, is mercy incarnate. As Jesus said, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life*" [Jn. 3:16]. St. Paul wrote, "*God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us*" [Rom. 5:8]. For Paul, Jesus Himself reconciles us to God and to one another: "*For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity... that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross...*" [Eph. 2:14-16].

In his First Letter, St. John proclaims that all of us who believe that Jesus is the Christ are begotten by God. In other words, we have become God's sons and daughters. Therefore, we are to be merciful as God is merciful [Lk. 6:36]. To be merciful like God is to be both compassionate and forgiving. However, even more importantly, we are called to actively become healers and reconcilers within our families, our communities, and our world.

To be compassionate and forgiving and to become healers and reconcilers, we have to have experienced God's mercy, compassion, and reconciliation ourselves. This is why the Sacrament of Reconciliation is so important, yet today so many Catholics have abandoned the sacrament that Jesus gave not to be a burden but a gift to us. Recently, a high school student wrote about her experience with the sacrament of Reconciliation:

I left that reconciliation with my soul on fire....My motives in life turned from selfish to helping others. My faith routines became more thoughtful and pure hearted. That reconciliation sparked a spiritual conversion.

Today's reading from Acts of the Apostles draws a picture of the ideal Christian community. According to Acts, in the ideal Christian community, believers are united in mind and heart, share everything, and witness to the resurrection of Jesus. The Acts of the Apostles has several other similar passages. However, we need to realize that this ideal community never existed in practice. For example, although the next verses of Acts 4 tell about Barnabas selling property and bringing the proceeds to the apostles, the next chapter tells the story of Ananias and Sapphira who kept some of the proceeds from the sale of their property and lied to the apostles about it.

My brothers and sisters, my point in telling this is to remind us of two truths. First, there is no perfect Christian community. However, as a community, we must constantly strive for the ideal. Second, to remain committed members of the Church, we have to see the community with eyes of faith. We have to see that despite the human limitations and sins of the community and its leaders, the Church is both divine and human. If we see the church community only as human, there really is no reason to continue to be part of a flawed community. If we see the Church only as divine, we will be disillusioned by the reality of the Church. We need to see the Church and our parish as they are: divine-human realities.