

2nd Sunday of Easter - C
Acts 5:12-16;
Revelation 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19;
John 20:19-31
Little Flower - 4/7/13

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Second Sunday of Easter, also called Divine Mercy Sunday. It seems to me that there are three elements in today's Gospel.

The first is Jesus' greeting: "*Peace be with you.*" The apostles' whole world had been shaken first by Jesus' death on the cross and then by his resurrection. Also, they were frightened for themselves. When Jesus stood in their midst, his first words were: "*Peace be with you.*" At the Last Supper, Jesus had said, "*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.*" [John 14:27]. The peace that Jesus bestows is an inner peace rooted in faith in him.

Second, Jesus breathed on the Apostles and said, "*Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.*" On one level, the Church has always understood this passage as the institution of the sacrament of Reconciliation. Jesus entrusted the power to forgive sins to his apostles. It also answers the question how priests can forgive sins if God alone can forgive sins. Priests do not forgive sins through their own power but through the power of the Holy Spirit. Through the ministry of priests, Jesus forgives sins. More importantly, however, this passage affirms Jesus' superabundant love for us, his infinite forgiveness of our sins. After all, Jesus came into the world and died on the cross to forgive our sins. As Paul wrote to the Romans, "*God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us*" [5:8].

Third, Thomas was not with the other apostles on Easter Sunday evening. When they told him that Jesus had appeared, he insisted he would not believe "*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...*" The following Sunday, Jesus complied with his request. Thomas answered, "*My Lord and my God.*" Jesus responded, "*Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.*"

When I was growing up, we were taught to say "My Lord and my God" at Mass when the host and chalice were elevated after the consecration. Today, as many people struggle with belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, we might want to re-introduce this practice in order to deepen our faith. In the final analysis, we do not want to be like Thomas, who is often called doubting Thomas. Rather we want Jesus to say of us: "*Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.*"

My brothers and sisters, when Jesus rose from the dead, he triumphed over sin, suffering, sickness, and death. His triumph can be seen in today's reading from the Book of Revelation. On the island of Patmos to which John had been exiled because "*he proclaimed God's word and gave testimony to Jesus,*" John had a vision of one like a son of man, wearing an ankle-length robe with a gold sash around his chest and standing in the midst of seven gold lampstands. However, more important than his appearance were his words to John: "*Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, the one who lives. Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever. I hold the keys to death and the netherworld.*" If we have faith in Jesus and if our sins have been forgiven, these words of Jesus offer us a peace that the world cannot give.