

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

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Second Sunday of Easter, the Octave Day of Easter. In the Church, octaves extend 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. Twenty years ago, St. John Paul II designated the Second Sunday of Easter as 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.

As a parish and as an archdiocese, we have not been able to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation except in extreme circumstances since March 17, which was before our Lenten Penance Service. I know that for some of you this has been a hardship. As we celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday, we need to remember that God's mercy and forgiveness are not limited to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As Pope Francis has said so often, mercy is the quality most proper to God. Therefore, those who are not able to receive the Sacrament during this time should not worry. This pandemic offers a powerful reminder that God can and does forgive our sins even when we cannot receive the sacrament.

Today, however, I want to focus on the reading from Acts. In a commentary, Fr. Henry Wansbrough argued that in today's first reading, Luke was painting a picture of the ideal Christian community.<sup>1</sup> We are told that the early Christians "*devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.*"

If there is one thing we have learned or should have learned from the coronavirus pandemic, it is the importance of community. At the very beginning of creation, God said, "*It is not good for the man to be alone*" [Gen. 2:18]. We were created to be in relationship with others. If we look at our life cycle, infants and small children are completely dependent on others. As we move from childhood through adolescence into adulthood, we strive to become independent. Sometimes adolescents and young adults try to be too independent. If we become fully mature, we realize that we and all human beings are interdependent.

Our interdependence and need for community have become very evident during this pandemic. We need only think about the importance of all those who work in sectors considered essential, especially those in the medical field and those who work in grocery stores and restaurants who really are risking their health and lives for all of us by going to work. Also, many of us are struggling with social distancing, social isolation, and loneliness during this time. I know that I very much miss spending quality time with others.

Jesus, of course, understood human nature better than any of us. Today 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 our need for community faith and community prayer, our need for *the breaking of the bread*, which was the early Church's name for Eucharist, and our need to serve one another and share with one another within the community.

My brothers and sisters, so many people have expressed how much they miss coming to Sunday Eucharist even though they watch the Mass live or recorded. So many people have said how much they miss receiving the Eucharist sacramentally although they make a Spiritual Communion every Sunday. Sometimes we have to lose something in order to appreciate it. If we reflect on this reading and if we reflect on our experience of interdependence, social distancing, social isolation and loneliness, I would hope that our appreciation for the Church, for our parish, and for Sunday Eucharist will deepen.

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Wansbrough, O.S.B., "Acts of the Apostles," *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, ed by Rev. Reginald C. Fuller et al., (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1975), sec. 852k, p. 1082.