

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter - B  
Acts 4:32-35;  
I John 5:1-6;  
John 20:19-31  
Little Flower - 4/11/21

My Brothers and Sisters,

The Second Sunday of Easter is also called the Sunday of Divine Mercy. Both in the pre-Vatican II Liturgy and today's Liturgy, the Gospel for this Sunday is the Gospel of the institution of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Traditionally the Second Sunday of Easter was called *Dominica in Albis* or Low Sunday. *Dominica in Albis* means Sunday in White. When the Elect are baptized on Holy Saturday, they are clothed in a white garment. In the early Church, they wore the white garment for a week. On the Sunday after Easter, they went back to wearing regular clothes. The Second Sunday of Easter was also the Octave Day of Easter. Easter Sunday was High Sunday, and its Octave Day was Low Sunday.

Today's Gospel has three important messages for us. After Jesus extended peace to his apostles, he sent them forth: "*As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*" The word *apostle* means one who is sent. Just as Jesus was sent by his Father, he sent forth his apostles to carry on his mission and ministry. Today he sends us forth to carry on his ministry and mission in our world. We are called to be his hands and feet in the world today.

Jesus then breathed on them and said, "*Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.*" With those words, Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Divine mercy means more than the Sacrament of Reconciliation. When we talk about divine mercy, we are talking, first of all, about Jesus' death on the cross to save us from sin. According to St. Paul, "*God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us*" [Romans 5:8]. What this means is that because Christ died on the cross once for all, our sins are forgiven before we even commit them. We only have to be sorry for them and accept that forgiveness. We experience divine mercy most personally in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. However, the Church teaches that whenever we receive the Eucharist worthily, all venial sins are forgiven. Likewise, we experience divine mercy whenever we are forgiven by others or when we forgive others. Although we tend to equate the word *mercy* with forgiveness, divine mercy also includes all God's gifts and goodness to us.

Today's Gospel also challenges our faith. When Jesus appeared to the apostles on Easter Sunday, Thomas was not with them. When they told him that they had seen the Lord, he said he would not believe unless he could see the mark of the nails in his hands and put his finger into them and his hand into his side. The next week Jesus appeared again and invited Thomas to do just that. Thomas then professed faith in Jesus, but Jesus said, "*Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.*" At times many of us struggle with faith because we want to see, we want proof, before we believe. "*Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.*"

My brothers and sisters, today's reading from Acts is one of two or three passages in Acts that describe the ideal Christian community. At the beginning of the pandemic, we celebrated our Sunday Liturgies in an empty church except for essential ministers: Tom, Mike Kanney, Katie Leszcynski, and Angie Mackell. When we were allowed to return, we returned with very few people, but gradually our numbers have grown. I am not sure if you have felt what Tom and I and others on staff have felt. With reduced numbers, our Liturgies still do not have the life and energy they once had. It has become perfectly clear to me how much we give life to each other by our presence and participation. Our Little Flower community will not return to full life until many who are not yet here return. We look forward to and hope for that day.