

2nd Sunday of Easter - A
Acts 2:42-47;
1 Peter 1:3-9;
John 20:19-31
Little Flower - 4/16/23

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. It was also called Sunday in White because this was the day when the newly baptized stopped wearing their white baptismal garments and went back to wearing regular clothes. In the year 2000, Pope John Paul II designated the Second Sunday of Easter Divine Mercy Sunday. Every year the Gospel on this Sunday tells the story of Jesus' institution of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In his First Letter, St. Peter wrote that God "*in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*" Pope Francis often reminds us that mercy is the quality most proper to God. God's mercy, however, is not limited to God's forgiveness. Mercy encompasses all of God's love for us, God's goodness to us, all of God's gifts to us. Likewise, when we are good to others, when we share our gifts with others, when we are sensitive and responsive to the needs of others, and when we forgive others, we participate in God's mercy and make God's mercy real and present in their lives.

Today, however, I would like to focus on God's mercy as forgiveness. As people get older, and I include myself in this, they reflect more on their lives. The more they reflect on their lives, the more they become aware of and become sorry for all the things they did wrong and all the good they failed to do. Consequently, they become aware of God's great mercy and forgiveness in their lives. Because they cannot undo the wrong they did or do the good they failed to do, they realize how much they need God's continuing mercy. If they are honest with themselves, they become more willing to extend mercy and forgiveness to others.

We all know that today very few people go to confession. For too long, Catholics went to confession primarily out of obligation. If a person committed a serious sin, except in extraordinary circumstances, confession was the only way to be forgiven. Likewise, one of the commandments of the Church was to go to confession at least once a year, which did not bind if one had not committed serious sin. For so many people, confession caused anxiety and was burdensome. We need to completely reframe how we view the sacrament.

Jesus never intended the sacrament of Reconciliation to be a burden but a gift. In giving us the sacrament, Jesus wanted us to experience his forgiving love in a fully human way. Although it is always difficult to admit we messed up and did wrong, confessing our sins to a priest and hearing the words of forgiveness can be healing. One Lent I asked all the adults who came to confession if they had sins from the past that still burdened them. Almost every single person had at least one! Please consider coming to confession not to fulfill an obligation but to receive a gift.

My brothers and sisters, 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. 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.