



SUNDAY REFLECTION

Today's Gospel reminds us that our faith is connected with that of the very first of Jesus' disciples who reached full faith in Him on the first Easter Sunday. If we are tempted to feel underprivileged in comparison with those first disciples to whom the risen Jesus came, showed Himself and spoke personally, we should re-read the Gospel, noticing that Jesus acted in this way not towards a Pilate or a Caiphas or anyone else who did not welcome Him but towards those who already believed in Him. Moreover, it is only by Jesus' initiative and actions that they progress in their faith. Even when Jesus, taking up Thomas' challenge, comes to the disciples again. Thomas believes not because he touches Jesus but in obedience to Jesus' command. Far from being 'doubting Thomas' he is the only disciple who is said explicitly to believe and his profession of faith is the most profound in the whole New Testament. Although he believes because he sees, this seeing is not mere physical perception but, ironically, the vision of faith. The point which John makes in his final comment is that all those who - like Thomas and the Beloved Disciple (vs.8) - see with the eyes of faith the signs which John has written will have the same divine life as that of the disciples whose faith journey he has just described. There is no such thing as a second-class disciple. All disciples believe only by a pure gift of God in Jesus through the inspiration the Holy Spirit. Likewise, all disciples - of whatever generation - participate in Jesus' mission from His Father.

The First Reading (Acts 4:32-35) illustrates the effect of the Easter faith on the lives of believers. The spiritual community of faith is expressed in the concrete community of everyday

life. Although a tightly-knitted community like that of the first Jerusalem Church may not be found everywhere to day, the principle of sharing material goods still applies to all the faithful at all time and in all places. As Christians, we are all called to make the gospel real in our community, be this local, national or worldwide, by sharing God's gifts to us, that is, by putting our abilities, skills time and material goods at the service of our fellow men and women, in the realization that we are God's stewards, managers of God's creation.

The Second Reading (1 Jn. 5:1-6) situates the origin of the Christian drive towards real human fellowship in the fact that, through faith, a person becomes a child of God. This implies that all men and women are – at least potentially – God's children, members of one family, having the same Father. The motivation of Christian concern for social justice is not simply that all men and women have the same dignity and rights as human beings but that – precisely because they are human beings, made in God's image – they are all called to be brothers and sisters in Christ. Vatican II described the Church as the sacrament, that is, both the sign and the means of the intimate union of people with God and of the unity of the whole of humankind. The Holy Spirit whom Jesus communicates to us, here and now, as we reflect on God's word, makes us one new being, the representative of the Father in the world. Our mission is to ensure that we live this reality and so, as the 'lumen gentium' ('the light of the nations'), shed the light that is God's love on all of God's children presently scattered throughout the world, thus bringing us all into the one family of God the Father.

The Gospel reading tells us that the disciples 'were filled with joy when they saw the Lord.' Though we have not seen the Lord we can share their joy. We believe that the risen Jesus is with us now. His words to Thomas: 'Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe' apply to us. They assure us that believing is the important thing. They invite us to make our own Thomas' robust proclamation of faith: 'My Lord and my God.'

Surely, our Easter joy will be enhanced by the assurance that 'Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten by God.' The Father has begotten each of the baptized out of sheer love. We are expected to return love for love. We do this by obeying the commandments. Authentic love of the Father must overflow into a sincere love for each of our sisters and brothers. Religious practice without love of neighbor is a sham. Love is the fullness of the law.

The members of the Church in Jerusalem were Christians in name and in reality. They displayed love of the Father and of the children of the Father. The model community described by Luke displays just one expression of genuine Christian love. There are many ways of bringing God's love into people's lives. This is an appropriate time to assess our zeal on a personal and community level. The Paschal season is a time of renewal. This Eastertide, the first Paschal season of the new millennium, should be the occasion for implementing with reawakened enthusiasm Paul's directive: 'Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord.' (Rom. 12:11).

When Jesus breathed on the disciples He bestowed the gift of the Holy Spirit. He also entrusted them with a mission. 'From this hour onward, the mission of Christ and the Spirit becomes the mission of the Church: "As the Father sent me, even so I send you".' (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 730). We the members of the Church, have received the gift of the Spirit. Through the witness of a Christian life, each of us is expected to follow the example of the

apostles by testifying 'to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power.' The Paschal mystery is the climax of the liturgical year. It should be the center of our lives. We are living in the era of the resurrection. Therefore, we should live as 'Resurrection People'.

STEWARDSHIP: The Christian community described in Acts understood and practiced total stewardship. St. Paul reports that the believers did not claim anything as their own, but held everything in common, and distributed to each whatever was needed.

READINGS THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

18 APR '21

Acts 3:13-15, 17-19: Peter proclaims what happened to Jesus, sets this in the context of God's will as expressed in the Hebrew Scriptures, and challenges his hearers to respond by repenting of their sins.

1 Jn. 2:1-5: The writer stresses the importance of living out our belief in Jesus; otherwise we are not living the truth.

Lk. 24:35-48: Jesus presents Himself to the disciples in Jerusalem as they digest the report of the two who have returned from Emmaus.



DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY:

The world was in the midst of the Great Depression in 1931 and the memories of World War I were still very much alive in the minds of Europeans when in Poland a sister of the Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938), is said to have been personally visited by Jesus.

According to her diary, which was listed on the Index of Forbidden Books for more than 20 years, an image was revealed to her of the risen Lord, from whose heart shone two rays, one red (representing blood) and the other "pale" (symbolizing water), with the words "Jesus, I trust in you" at the bottom. Faustina wrote in her diary that Jesus told her, "I promise that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish."

When she was canonized in 2000 under the direction of fellow countryman Pope John Paul II, he proclaimed that the Second Sunday of Easter would henceforth be known as Divine Mercy

Sunday, thereby widely promoting the devotional practices associated with Faustina's visions, already popular in many communities.

St. Faustina, a poorly educated daughter of a humble Polish family, kept a 600-page diary of the apparitions she claimed continued for years. Her entries focus on God's mercy, the call to accept God's mercy and to be merciful, the need for conversion, and the call to trust in Jesus. It had been Jesus' own wish, she wrote, to establish a feast day: "I [Jesus] desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls. . . . I am giving them the last hope of salvation; that is, the Feast of My Mercy."

Among the practices associated with the devotion are its novena, the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy (a series of prayers organized similarly to a rosary), the Hour of Great Mercy (a time of prayer traditionally celebrated at 3 p.m.), and the plenary indulgence granted to those who receive the Eucharist and celebrate reconciliation on Divine Mercy Sunday.

But the road to the universal recognition and institutionalization of the devotion was anything but smooth. Since Sister Faustina's diary, which she claimed Jesus Himself had asked her to keep, had been previously listed on the Index of Forbidden Books, it curtailed the exercise of the devotional practices. Detractors claimed that her writing contained theological errors, while her defenders attribute mistakes to a faulty translation from Polish to Italian. While the diary is no longer on the Index and her canonization has officially put away concerns regarding the orthodoxy of her writings, critics remain.

The celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday is an opportunity to reflect on the theme of how God's mercy can overcome sin and, as the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments states, "a perennial invitation to the Christian world to face, with confidence in divine benevolence, the difficulties and trials that mankind [sic] will experience in the years to come."

DOUBTING THOMAS SUNDAY

Every year on the Second Sunday of Easter, the apostle Thomas has taken center stage. Due to the Gospel reading from Jn. 20:19-31 we came to know this Sunday as Thomas Sunday or Doubting Thomas Sunday since his skepticism regarding the bodily resurrection of Jesus as related to him by the other apostles is presented in the reading. Thomas almost comes off as the first-century version of a hyper-rational empiricist. Of course, when Jesus offers him the hard evidence he demands, Thomas can only stammer out "My Lord and my God!"

Most of us know the general story of "Doubting Thomas." In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you' ... The other disciples said to [Thomas] 'We have seen the Lord,' but he answered, 'Unless I can see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe.' (John 20:19, 25)

The Gospels tell an incredible story. A virginal conception. Miraculous healings. Even people coming back from the dead. How are we to know that it's not all just a fanciful fabrication?

There is strong evidence for the truth, the reliability of the gospels, but here is one of the strongest bits of evidence. Think for a minute. If you were part of a group who decided to perpetrate an elaborate hoax, what would be your motive? Wouldn't you want to gain some significant benefits from such a risky business? Maybe fortune, fame, and privilege? And if you were to be prominent figures in this tall tale, wouldn't you at least want the story to make you look good? But in the story told by the apostles, virtually all of them look real bad. During Jesus public ministry they repeatedly fail to "get it." In fact Jesus wears himself out trying to hammer the truth through their thick skulls. After witnessing three years of miracles, one of them betrays Jesus and the leader of the group denies him. All but one run away when he's crucified, and no one believes Mary Magdalene when she brings them the news of his resurrection.

And there is the Apostle Thomas, Doubting Thomas, the episode recounted in John 20:19-31 takes the cake. The Risen Christ appears to the twelve on Easter Sunday evening. Or rather, to be accurate to the text it should be said that He appeared to the ten. Judas, the traitor, had taken his own life. And Thomas, the twin, missed the occasion. When Thomas returns to the group, he refuses to believe them. He demands empirical proof submitted personally to his lordship: "Unless I put *my* finger in the nail marks in His hands and place *my* hand in His side, I will *not* believe." This sounds more like a pouting of a child than the words of an apostle.

So we face the issue of justice and Divine mercy. In justice, Jesus could have just said "enough." Thomas had already seen so much. Acts 1 tells us that Judas was replaced by Matthias. This ungrateful skeptic could easily have been replaced as well.

But Jesus does not deal with us by virtue of strict justice. God forbid! No, He comes to us in mercy, giving us what we do not deserve. And that's how He dealt with this doubter. A week later, He gives him what he asked for. Imagine how badly Thomas yearned to eat his words as he put his hand into the sacred side of the New Adam.

Thomas can't be said to come to true "faith" in the resurrection through all this. Because faith is about believing what you can't see. Walking by faith means NOT walking by sight. In heaven, we'll see God face to face, so "faith" will be no more. Blessed, says Jesus, are those who have not seen, and yet believe.

But Thomas does come to faith in something else that he can't quite see. He saw Lazarus, the son of the widow of Nain plus the daughter of Jairus, all raised from the dead.

Thomas now looks at yet another risen human being before him and says what he did not say to the prior three: "*My Lord and My God.*" Thomas here professes what can only be seen by the eye of faith. The resurrection of Jesus is not just a marvel for *Ripley's Believe it or Not*. Jesus is not just some first century Houdini. No, his resurrection is a sign that he is the Messiah, the King, even the Eternal God, come in the flesh.

So we have the Apostles and Divine Mercy with Thomas the prime example for all of us, humbled by Christ's mercy, Thomas is content to be known for all generations as "Doubting Thomas." Thomas the Doubter and the other apostles spread a story in which they look real bad. And for it they receive not privilege but persecution and death.

So why do they spread the story? Because it's the truth. And because it's a proclamation of the Divine Mercy of God who does not reject the thick-headed, the weak, and the doubting but

instead gives them the power to become strong, loving, and wise. “Behold,” says Jesus, “I make all things new.” (Rev 21:5)

DOUBT & QUESTIONING

For a variety of reasons the belief was developed that it was sinful to doubt or question any teaching of the Catholic Church.

Arguably the most original thinker in Church history, St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) defined theology as “faith seeking understanding,” whether by homespun everyday reflection or with formal study. Faith is a dynamic gift of God. It innately drives us to theologize, to ask the ultimate questions of life more deeply, to make better sense of what it all means. We stagnate and risk superficial living when we think we’re done, there’s nothing more to learn about belief and unbelief.

Mature growth in Catholic spirituality never ends with Confirmation, the completion of baptism. If we are to become our best selves, it’s an ongoing search, a life-long journey into the Mystery of God with fellow disciples walking the way of Jesus.

As a young or older adult, do yourself a spiritual favor and get hold of “Introduction to Christianity,” written in the late 1960s by a world class theologian, Joseph Ratzinger, better known and loved as Pope Benedict XVI. It’s not an easy read but very much worth the personal effort. Professor Ratzinger gives us a lengthy overview of secular thought to show how the 12, ancient articles of the Apostles Creed still have relevance.

He begins at the beginning of our challenging search: “Chapter 1, Part 1: Doubt and belief – Man’s situation before the question of God.” Ratzinger reassures us that doubt is inevitable. It’s part and parcel of our limited grasp of the complex data which impact us from all sides. It’s nothing we need deny or feel ashamed about.

Human nature strives instinctively for a bigger picture to tie together the details of our experience, which often seem contradictory. Faith offers us that bigger picture, but paradoxically, doubt can refine and actually strengthen faith this side of heaven. It prods us not to suppress but to face our questions squarely and keep seeking clearer answers so we can better understand what faith entails. Doubt can also be preventive. It urges us to second guess any lurking decision to give up the struggle and settle for dysfunctional, escapist behavior, e.g., the whole bar room scene as routine.

We do well learning from Thomas the Apostle as John’s Gospel remembers him. He was a real person. Apparently impulsive, he misunderstood why Jesus chose to wait for news that Lazarus had died. He jumped to a hasty suggestion for his fellow-disciples. (John 11:14-16) He was off base, but no problem. They all stuck with the Lord, and the astounding miracle unfolded of a man’s resuscitation after his death.

Then, at the Last Supper, the upper room was tense with uncertainty. Jesus told those at the table that where he was going, they knew the way. Thomas did not, and wanted him to clarify what he just said: “Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” (John 14:5)

Jesus identified himself as “the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father.” (John 14:6-7)

Thomas couldn't hang on to this self-disclosure of a Godly mediator right next to him. Instead, he fled at the betrayal which soon followed. He was nowhere to be found on the way to Calvary and the horror of death by crucifixion. He was absent when the Risen Christ appeared to those assembled that first Easter evening. (John 20:24-29)

There was drama in the upper room a week later with Thomas present. Once again the Messiah, the Christ, appeared (New Testament Greek: "made himself known") in his resurrected body. He bore the visible marks of his death, but now his humanity was fully transformed in glory, a state radically superior to resuscitation.

Jesus accepted the stern conditions Thomas required for him to believe that the crucified Nazarene was resurrected. He invited the doubting apostle to touch his wounds and see for himself first-hand. Humbled as much as awed, Thomas exclaimed reverently for all to hear, "My Lord and my God!"

The Lord asked if he came to believe because he saw. "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." Yes, St. Thomas struggled with skepticism into adulthood, but by the grace of Jesus' victory, he persevered to martyrdom, evangelizing in India.

John's Gospel considers him a hero, a determined work in progress. His profession of faith is a bookend of the text. "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us," begins the Good News. (John 1:14) "My Lord and my God" is the fitting response of every brother or sister who meets the Word in their flesh.

EASTER SEASON LASTS 50 DAYS

The proclamation of Easter does not end with Easter Sunday: that is only the beginning. The Easter season, known as Easter Time, is celebrated for 50 days. It culminates with the celebration of Jesus' ascension into heaven, and Pentecost, which marks the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles and birthday of the Church. The Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord is Thursday, May 13, but since it is a moveable feast, it is transferred in our diocese to Sunday, May 16 and Pentecost will be celebrated Sunday, May 23.

The celebration of the Easter Vigil is the beginning of the season of Easter. The Vigil is the Christian feast *par excellence*, the feast of new birth, new beginnings, salvation renewed, and humanity restored to the Lord. While the Vigil marks the end of the paschal fast, the end of the celebration of Holy Week, and the end of repentance and conversion for which Lent prepared the community, it is much more a beginning. It is the beginning of a new season of grace and a time of joy and thanksgiving, for Easter is not one day or one solemnity—it is a fifty day celebration, and the fifty days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday together comprise what the General Instruction terms "the great Sunday".

From apostolic times the feasts of Easter and Pentecost were primary, and the paschal mystery was the first celebration to have both a time before the feast of preparation and a time afterwards for the extension and completing the celebration. In the new Sacramentary and Lectionary the Sundays following Easter are no longer termed "after" for they are "of" Easter, since they do not follow a solemnity, but they are to be taken as a unity to form one season of solemnity and exaltation at the triumph of Jesus over sin and death.

In the former understanding of the season the feast of the Pentecost was set off because it had its own octave. In the reformed calendar this situation is remedied for the solemnity of the Ascension does not end the season of Easter; it is one special day within an entire special season. The Easter candle is no longer extinguished on the Ascension for it should remain in prominence in the sanctuary until Pentecost and then be placed in the baptistry. It can be used at funerals and at the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. The feast of Pentecost now concludes the Easter season and the week between Ascension and Pentecost should be a time of preparation and expectation for the coming of the Spirit.

The major principle of the calendar reform called for at the Vatican Council—that the paschal mystery be the center of the Christian year—is made obvious in the new Sacramentary because of the emphasis on Easter as the great feast of fifty days.

The Easter candle, lighted for the first time from the new fire of the Easter Vigil, is placed in a prominent place in the sanctuary between Easter and Pentecost and should be lighted for all liturgical services in this season and should be incensed whenever incense is used in the fifty days.

The color of the vesture for the season is white, and the cloth or frontal for the altar should be white as well. Liturgical hangings or banners should be made of white and contrasting colors and should reflect the season of new life, fulfillment, rejoicing and joy at the season.

PRAYERS

Divine Mercy Prayer

"Dear God, I know I'm a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe Jesus Christ is Your Son. I believe that He died for my sin and that you raised Him to life. I want to trust Him as my Savior and follow Him as Lord, from this day forward. Guide my life and help me to do your will. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen."

Prayer for Trust in The Divine Mercy of God

Most merciful Jesus,

I turn to You in my need.

You are worthy of my complete trust.

You are faithful in all things.

When my life is filled with confusion, give me clarity and faith.

When I am tempted to despair, fill my soul with hope.

Most merciful Jesus,

I trust You in all things.

I trust in Your perfect plan for my life.

I trust You when I cannot comprehend Your divine will.

I trust You when all feels lost.

Jesus, I trust You more than I trust myself.

Most merciful Jesus,

You are all-knowing.

Nothing is beyond Your sight.
You are all-loving.
Nothing in my life is beyond Your concern.
You are all-powerful.
Nothing is beyond Your grace.

Most merciful Jesus,
I trust in You,
I trust in You,
I trust in You.
May I trust You always and in all things.
May I daily surrender to Your Divine Mercy.

Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy,
Pray for us as we turn to you in our need.
Amen.

Prayer to St. Joseph

Glorious Patriarch Saint Joseph, whose power makes the impossible possible, come to my aid in these times of anguish and difficulty. Take under your protection the serious and troubling situations that I commend to you, that they may have a happy outcome (*here make your request*).
My beloved father, all my trust is in you. Let it not be said that I invoked you in vain, and since you can do everything with Jesus and Mary, show me that your goodness is as great as your power. Amen

**SCHEDULE SECOND WEEK of EASTER
SATURDAY 10 - SUNDAY 11 APRIL**

Saturday 10 Apr Saturday Within the Octave of Easter

8:30 a.m. Mass Gloria, Easter Preface I & Eucharistic Prayer II

9:00 – 12:00 p.m. Baptisms

1:30 – 4:30 p.m. Confession

5:00 p.m. Vigil Second Sunday of Easter Divine Mercy Sunday
Gloria, Creed, Easter Preface I & Eucharistic Prayer I

Sunday 11 Apr Second Sunday of Easter Divine Mercy Sunday

7:00 a.m. Mass Gloria, Creed, Easter Preface I & Eucharistic Prayer I

8:30 a.m. Mass Gloria, Creed, Easter Preface I & Eucharistic Prayer I

11:30 a.m. Mass Gloria, Creed, Easter Preface I & Eucharistic Prayer I

2:00 p.m. Brig Mass

3:00 p.m. Divine Mercy Devotions

Monday 12 Apr Day Off

6:00 p.m. Meeting

Tuesday 13 Apr Easter Weekday St. Martin I, Pope, Martyr

**8:30 a.m. Mass Proper of Memorial Easter Preface II Eucharistic Prayer II
Intention: Turbitt Family**

6:00 p.m. Meeting

Wednesday 14 Apr Easter Weekday

**6:30 a.m. Mass Proper, Easter Preface III & Eucharistic Prayer III
Intention: Parish of St. Stephen, Martyr**

7:00 a.m.-8:30 a.m. Confessions

**8:30 a.m. Mass Proper, Easter Preface III & Eucharistic Prayer III
Intention: Daily Rosary Group**

10:00 a.m. Mass Willow Creek

Thursday 15 Apr Easter Weekday

**8:30 a.m. Mass Proper, Easter Preface IV & Eucharistic Prayer II
Intention: Intentions of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

9:00 a.m. Baptism

5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. Confessions

**6:30 p.m. Mass Proper, Easter Preface IV & Eucharistic Prayer II
Intention: Parish of St. Stephen, Martyr**

Friday 16 Apr Easter Week

**8:30 a.m. Mass Proper, Easter Preface V & Eucharistic Prayer III
Intention: Leona Raniszewski**

5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. Adoration & Confessions

Saturday 17 Apr Easter Week

**8:30 a.m. Mass Proper, Easter Preface I & Eucharistic Prayer II
Intention: Parish of St. Stephen, Martyr**

1:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. Confessions

**5:00 p.m. Mass Vigil Third Sunday of Easter
Gloria, Creed, Easter Preface III, Eucharistic Prayer I**

Sunday 18 Apr Third Sunday of Easter

7:00 a.m. Mass Gloria, Creed, Easter Preface III, Eucharistic Prayer I

8:30 a.m. Mass Gloria, Creed, Easter Preface III, Eucharistic Prayer I

11:30 a.m. Mass Gloria, Creed, Easter Preface III, Eucharistic Prayer I

2:00 p.m. Brig Mass