

Second Sunday of Easter/Divine Mercy Sunday
April 11, 2021

What a glorious week this has been, both in the world of nature all around us, but also here in the Liturgical life of the Church. This entire week has been an Octave-long celebration of Easter Day! That celebration began, of course, last Sunday on the picture-perfect Spring Easter Day; but because Easter is a Solemnity of the highest liturgical rank, throughout the Easter Octave, each day of this week has been as though it's still Easter Day. The Octave concludes, of course, today, which besides being the conclusion of the Easter Octave, is also the celebration of "Divine Mercy" Sunday. So, our hearts continue to be filled with Easter Joy.

Since each of the four Gospels record the Resurrection of Jesus, on each day of this Octave, we have been able to hear how Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke and John each recorded this most important Event, the Central Mystery of our Christian Faith.

On Monday, St. Matthew recounted how "*Mary Magdalene and the other Mary*" encountered the Risen Jesus Who said to them: "*Do not be afraid!*", and then he sent them on the first Easter mission: "*Go tell My brothers to meet me in Galilee*".

On Tuesday, St. John told us about Mary Magdalene weeping outside the Empty Tomb, and has a conversation with who at first she thought was the Gardener, and then, when that Person said her name, "Mary", she realized was in fact the Risen Jesus, Who said: "*Stop holding on to Me.....go to my brothers and tell them.*"

On Wednesday, we heard from St. Luke the beautiful account of the two discouraged and downcast disciples leaving Jerusalem, returning to their hometown of Emmaus because their "hopes" had been dashed; when suddenly "a Stranger" begins walking along with them, Who explains to them the meaning of the Scriptures. When they prevail upon Him to "*stay with them*", He joins them for dinner, and they immediately recognize Him "*in the breaking of the Bread*". When the Stranger, Who they know then to be the Risen Jesus, vanishes from their sight, they race back to Jerusalem to tell this Good News to the other Apostles.

On Thursday, St. Luke tells how the Risen Jesus comes into the midst of the Apostles and speaks those powerful words: "*Peace be with you*", and tells them to not be troubled, and assures them He is not a ghost by eating a piece of baked fish.

On Friday, St. John recounts “*the third time that Jesus revealed Himself*” to the Apostles who had decided to go fishing, but were totally unsuccessful, until “a Stranger” on the shore coaches them to cast their net on the right side of the Boat, and they make a miraculous catch of 153 fish. He invites them for breakfast, which reminds them again of the Eucharist, and enables them to proclaim “*It is the Lord!*”.

And just yesterday, St. Mark tells us again about Mary Magdalene, who went to tell the Apostles who remained unconvinced, when Jesus appeared to them and took them to task for their “*unbelief*”.

And now, today, we hear again from St. John, who tells us about Jesus’ appearance to the frightened Apostles, hiding behind locked doors in the Upper Room, both on Easter Sunday night, and then a week later, on what would be this very day---a week later. Each time, Jesus greets the Apostles with “*Peace be with you!*”

What’s missing in each of those accounts is “Faith”. The Apostles are shocked, amazed, one account talks about the mixed feelings of amazement and joy---but no where in these early appearances of the Risen Jesus do we find total, absolute, convicted “Faith”! There were several steps yet that the Apostles had to go through, and ultimately, it would take the coming of the Holy Spirit, before the Apostles could move away from doubt and fear to conviction and the fervor of Faith. And so, we see that the Risen Jesus patiently takes one step at a time, beginning with replacing their Fear with His Peace! His suffering, Death and Resurrection has won salvation for the world, and so, “Peace” should be our prevailing attitude as followers of Jesus; finding the Peace of the Risen Jesus in our hearts, as well as sharing that Peace of Jesus with others. If we remember from the beautiful proclamation of the “Exultet” at the Easter Vigil proclaiming Easter praises, we hear that it is Jesus’ Peace that takes away all fear, dispels all doubt, eliminates all guilt and shame, and frees us from past mistakes. No matter what’s happened in our lives in the past, no matter what’s going on in our lives at present, and no matter what fears we might have about the future, Jesus has been Raised from the dead, and we share in that Victory in our lives. Jesus is Risen; be at Peace!

Easter Peace is also the result of being forgiven **and** of being able to forgive others. The first part of today’s Gospel passage, immediately after Jesus extended His Peace to the Apostles, was when Jesus gave the Apostles, and all priests, the authority to forgive sins in the Name of the Risen Jesus. But, forgiveness is not just one-sided; as we are forgiven, so must we be forgiving.

As we know, today is also known as “Divine Mercy Sunday”, established by Pope St. John Paul II, and based on St. Faustina’s apparitions, in which she said: “*Jesus, I trust in You, have mercy upon us and upon the whole world. Amen.*”

Easter is about “new beginnings” and new life. It’s about living with the Peace of the Risen Jesus in our hearts, and sharing that Gift of Peace with others. It’s about the powerful Gift of Jesus’ forgiveness for our sins, and about our obligation to extend that same forgiveness to others in our lives.

When St. Thomas finally was present, and realized with certainty that this really was the Risen Jesus showing him His Wounds, Thomas proclaimed with the greatest Act of Faith on record: “*My Lord, and my God!*” May we be equally believing and trusting; may we be hope-filled and convicted in our Faith; may we live with the Peace of Christ in our hearts, not just for these 50 days of the Easter Season, but always.

We know that Jesus comes to each of us and offers us the same life-changing effect of His Resurrection when He says to us: “*Peace be with you!*” No matter what our circumstances are, may our response be that same, heart-felt and profound expression of belief and trust of Thomas, not “the Doubter”, but “the Believer”: “My Lord and my God!” And may we add to that Act of Faith the same statement made by St. Faustina: “Jesus, I trust in You, now and forever.”

God bless you, now and always!