

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Divine Mercy Sunday; Holy Rosary Parish

Divine Mercy Sunday Vigil Mass

Holy Rosary Parish, Baltimore

Apr. 28, 2019

Introduction

As we read and reflect on the various Gospel accounts of Jesus' Resurrection, we can't help but notice that the reaction of his disciples was mixed. They were, by turns, astonished, overjoyed, fearful, and doubtful.

Do we not see all of these reactions to the Risen Lord in this afternoon's Gospel? The disciples were locked in the upper room out of fear – fear for their very lives. When, however, the Risen Lord appeared to them, the Gospel tells us, they rejoiced. Yet Thomas, who was absent on that momentous occasion, expressed doubt. To prove the Risen Lord's Presence, he demanded to touch the wounds in Jesus' hands, his feet and his side . . . Yes, it was quite a wide range of reactions to the Risen Lord. who was suffered, died, and was buried and rose from the grave, for the forgiveness of our sins, for the sake of showering upon us Divine Mercy.

On this Divine Mercy Sunday, let us ask where we stand with regard to the Divine Mercy the Risen Lord ardently desires to share with us. Are we fearful? Are we doubtful? Or, are we among those who rejoice? In other words, let us ask ourselves if we can really say, "Jesus, I trust in Thee!"

The Reaction of Fear

What about the reaction of fear? Let us return to the Gospel scene painted for us by John the Evangelist who tells us that the doors of the upper room were locked out of fear. The fear of those first disciples was understandable. Even though they were with Jesus day in and day out, they had not really comprehended who Jesus was and is. Nor did they fully comprehend his preaching, his parables, and his miracles. Even so, they were attracted to Jesus and they listened intently – for the Lord loved them

as brothers, and chose them to be his co-workers in truth. When the One in whom they had put their hopes was condemned and crucified, their world was shattered and they were truly in mortal danger. Those who followed Jesus of Nazareth were held in suspicion of disloyalty both by the Roman authorities and by the Chief Priests, the Scribes, and Pharisees. No wonder they were locked up and only ventured out quite cautiously.

Today many of our fellow Catholics are also actively persecuted and thus live in fear. We think, for example, of the Coptic Christians in Egypt. Their churches have been destroyed or shut down and some of their number have been beaten or killed. And how can we forget our fellow Catholics in Sri Lanka - over 350 of them - who were killed in the Easter Sunday bombings of churches and hotels. May they rest in the peace of the Risen Lord! Understandably, those who survived this savage bombing are living in fear.

What about our fears? While in the West we suffer from what Pope Francis calls “a polite persecution” - we can still openly practice our faith and worship as we please. So perhaps our fear is of another order. Perhaps it is not so much that the doors of our churches or houses are locked, but rather that the doors of our hearts are sometimes closed tight to God’s mercy. This can happen when we are so ashamed of our sins that we fear to admit the true nature of them, even to ourselves, let alone to the Lord and to the Church in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We can close off God’s mercy when we are fearful that, if we admit our sins, we will be challenged to give them up - especially those sins to which we have become accustomed. We may be fearful that our way of life would need to change, maybe even drastically. For that reason, we lock the doors of our hearts against the Divine Mercy that the Lord wishes to share with us, out of no other motive but pure love.

Yet, if the Risen Lord could pass through physical barriers such as locked doors, can he not also pass through the spiritual barriers we erect in our hearts? Can he not stand in the midst of even the most sinful heart and say to that person, “Peace be with you” - the peace of my forgiveness, the peace my mercy brings? If, on this Mercy Sunday you find that the doors of your hearts are barred, ask the Risen Lord to come into your hearts regardless and there impart to you the peace the world cannot give.

The Reaction of Doubt

What about the doubts we may entertain in the depths of our hearts and minds? Again, is it not understandable that the first disciples doubted the truth and reality of the Lord's Resurrection? Jesus predicted he would suffer, die, and rise many times before all this happened, but Scripture tells us that the disciples did not understand what it meant that Jesus would rise from the dead. Indeed, no human experience can compare with encountering one who was dead but now is alive, and not only resuscitated, but alive in a new and glorious way! Is it any wonder that the disciples entertained doubts - even though the burden of their doubts has been cast onto the shoulders of Thomas, so much so that he has gone down in history as "doubting Thomas". Twenty centuries later, we have the benefit of hindsight. We can look back on how the Apostles received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Spirit that made them bold and courageous witnesses of the Risen Lord. Nonetheless, we live in an age of doubt and skepticism. Tenets of our faith, such as the Incarnation and the Resurrection are regarded with suspicion, skepticism, and ridicule, by many of our contemporaries.

But what about us? Are we not also prone to doubt? Even if our faith is intact, are we not sometimes tempted to doubt God's mercy? Are we not tempted to doubt that God really loves us and really wants to forgive us? Do we not sometimes demand proof of God's mercy before we relent? But Jesus tells us that if we have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can uproot even a large tree and move mountains - including our sins with their deep roots and the mountain of our sins. Let us not doubt God's mercy nor the presence of the Risen Lord among us but instead say with St. Faustina, "Jesus, I trust in Thee!"

The Joy of Receiving God's Mercy

What, then, is the right way to encounter the mercy of the Lord, whether in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or the Holy Mass, or in Scripture, or the Divine Mercy Chaplet or in a moment of quiet prayer unto ourselves? When the Lord whispers in our hearts, "Peace be with you!" - when he confides in us and tells us of his mercy, our hearts should rejoice! They should be filled with hope and joy - a hope and joy we share with others! That the Lord would love us so much as to wipe out our sins,

to restore our baptismal innocence, to cleanse us inwardly, to set us free from slavery to sin—does not his mercy prove the power of his love?

Jesus suffered, died, and rose from the dead precisely to forgive our sins. At Mass, when the Precious Blood is consecrated, the priest says that it will be poured out “for the forgiveness of sins”. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, acting in the person of Christ, the priest absolves us from our sins. Let us believe that the Lord is just waiting to forgive us and that our repentance and forgiveness brings him and all of heaven great joy!

And more than that – when we receive Divine Mercy, we are challenged to become ourselves men and women of mercy and love, forgiving those who have wronged us, not harboring grudges, not even evil thoughts – but instead reaching out in love even to those who are our enemies. In this way, we bring the healing balm of mercy which the Risen Lord extends to us into a very divided and violent world – a world that needs mercy as much as ever. So let us set aside fear, let us set aside doubt, and instead embrace the mercy of the Risen Lord and rejoice in it – now and always!