

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Divine Mercy Sunday

Divine Mercy Sunday

Holy Rosary Parish

April 8, 2018

Last week, I had a phone conversation with Bishop David Foley, a priest and bishop whom I have known since I was a seminarian in the 1970's. At the time he was pastor of a parish not too far from the seminary and would sometimes spend a day in prayer in the seminary chapel. Once I was ordained, I came to know then-Monsignor Foley well and I was privileged to work with him on a few projects. He was an energetic and loving priest who was relentlessly cheerful. Later on he was ordained a bishop and some years ago, he retired.

Now it is time for this wonderful priest and bishop to go home to the Lord. He has an aggressive form of cancer resistant to any known medical treatment. So a few days ago I called him to reminisce, and really, to say goodbye. I also used the occasion to tell him something he said that most impacted my life. On the day he was ordained a bishop, he gave a little talk. He acknowledged what we all knew - that he was always cheerful, & went on to say: "Many people," he said, "ask me why I'm always cheerful. The answer, I guess, is because I go to confession every two weeks. If God loves me so much that he forgives my sins, what do I have to be sad about?"

I never forgot his words. They impacted my spiritual life in a big way. Now Bishop Foley is getting ready to go home to the Lord and instead of being upset or anxious, his soul is at peace. He is as cheerful about dying as he was about living. Why? Because he lived his life surrounded by the mercy of God. He believed in the Risen

Lord as the victor over sin and death. He believed that in the sacraments we share in the Lord's victory. And he lived a life of loving gratitude for the gift of God's mercy.

This afternoon, we have heard how the Risen Lord appeared to the Apostles. They were still struggling with doubt and fear yet they were overjoyed to see their Lord and Master in their midst. "Peace be with you!" Jesus said to them. And the peace which Jesus offered them and offers us is not a life free of suffering but rather that inexpressible joy of knowing that God truly loves us, that deep contentment that comes only when we place our lives in God's hands. Jesus is the source and the cause of that peace the world cannot give.

How we long for that kind of peace in our lives. Often we are anxious and upset about many things. We find ourselves mulling over the past, brooding over injuries we have received and inflicted on others, feeling guilty about sins we have committed, regretting missed opportunities. Our anxiety is heightened because we live in a world that is anything but peaceful. There is so much conflict and violence all around us and an unwillingness on the part of our culture to forgive and forget. As the late Cardinal George of Chicago said so perceptively, "The world permits everything and forgives nothing, God and the Church do not permit everything but forgive everything."

Mercy Sunday is a wonderful opportunity to experience more deeply the peace of Christ and the joy of receiving his mercy anew. In the midst of this glorious season of Easter, there is no better time than now to open our hearts to the Lord who died on the Cross and rose from the dead out of love for us - to save us from our sins and open for us the gates of heaven. This is the season to allow Jesus' love to touch our lives deeply, to heal us from our sins and to fill our hearts with overflowing love. As St. Faustina wrote in her diary: "Love is a mystery that transforms everything it touches into beautiful things that are pleasing to God. The love of God sets the soul free. Then it is like a queen, knowing nothing of the constraints of slavery."

Let us then ask, on this wonderful Sunday full of Easter joy, this Sunday made resplendent by the mercy of the Risen Lord - how is it that Jesus heals the wounds of our existence? How is it that he fills our souls with a peace and a joy that not even our worst trials and sufferings can rob us of?

To answer that question let us revisit the Gospel in which the Risen Lord appears to the disciples in the Upper Room. After greeting his disciples with the words, "Peace be with you!" - the Lord next shows his disciples his hands and his feet, and why does he do this? What the Lord is pointing out to them are wounds that remain on his glorified body, the wounds that were inflicted when Jesus was nailed to the Cross, as well as the opening his side when Jesus was pierced with the soldier's lance. You see, it is by these wounds of Jesus that our wounds are healed. The fact that he bears our wounds in his Risen Body tells us that in Jesus we can find healing from our sins and our spiritual injuries. For the wounds of Jesus are no longer merely flesh wounds - they are signs, living signs, sacraments if you will, of his grace and glory by which we are healed, redeemed, restored, and given a share in his Risen life.

John takes up that same theme in today's second reading where he speaks about the three witnesses to the Lord's Resurrection - the water, the blood, and the Holy Spirit. After Jesus died on the Cross, the soldier pierced his side and there flowed out blood and water - water symbolizing the Baptism and indeed the Sacrament of Penance, and blood symbolizing the Eucharist wherein we share in the Lord's Body and Blood. As the Lord died, he gave forth his spirit, namely, the Holy Spirit and in before Apostles in the Upper Room, he again breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit - whose sins you shall forgive are forgiven them and whose sins you shall retained are retained" - thus establishing the Sacrament of Mercy, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, by which you and I receive that forgiveness, that healing, that mercy that truly sets us free to love God and to love others and to live

lives of joy.

All of which brings me back to my good friend, Bishop Foley. He was joyful throughout his life and joyful in the face of death because he believed in the mercy of the Lord. Unlike doubting Thomas who would not believe in the Risen Lord until he had seen, Bishop Foley and indeed all those who take their spiritual lives seriously truly believe in the mercy of the Risen Lord and avail themselves of the Lord's peace and mercy by frequently and worthily receiving the Sacrament of Penance, laying before the Lord all the wounds of their existence so that the Lord, wounded out of love for us, can heal them.

On this Divine Mercy Sunday let us ask St. John Paul II and St. Faustina Kowalska to intercede for us that we may daily seek the mercies of the Lord and thus live as joyful disciples always spreading the Gospel by word and example. Let us ask their intercession for the Church, especially this Archdiocese of Baltimore, that more people will make use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and thus experience the joy, the freedom, and peace the world cannot give. Jesus, we trust in you!