**SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER**

**Divine Mercy**

St. John Paul II, who instituted Divine Mercy Sunday, loved to ponder the mystery of God, who first loved us. He often wrote of the human need to go beyond self through a free gift of self to others, a gift rooted in first receiving the love of God. He called this two-fold movement vertical and horizontal transcendence.

Vertical transcendence is movement beyond self toward God. This movement requires a choice to open our hearts to receive the everlasting love of God that we sing about in today’s Psalm. This opening to God’s love requires faith.

In the Gospel of this Second Sunday of Easter, we read about the struggle that Thomas the Apostle underwent in his faith. Thomas did have faith, faith enough to leave all to follow Jesus. Sometimes we fail to realize that faith in Jesus includes believing that he can overcome all things.

When Thomas hears that the others have seen the Risen Lord, his reply that he can’t believe unless he sees for himself echoes the cry of many hearts. Yes, we believe in God, but do we really believe that he wants our good? Do we believe that he can draw good even out of difficult circumstances? Do we believe that no obstacle, even death itself, can keep him from being present to us?

When Jesus appeared to the apostles, he didn’t argue with Thomas or condemn him for his weak faith. He spoke of peace as his gift to all in the midst of their fear. He invited Thomas to touch him, to obtain the sign he said he needed in order to believe. He further invited him to faith, to leave behind his unbelief and receive the gift of deep, unshakable belief.

Even though Caravaggio’s famous painting has left many thinking that Thomas actually touched the Risen Lord, John does not tell us whether he did or not. We simply hear the words of Thomas, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). This is one of the most profound affirmations of faith in the divinity of Christ in Scripture.

Interestingly, in popular imagination, Thomas has remained known as “Doubting Thomas.” His encounter with Jesus immediately follows the scene in which Jesus gave his apostles the gift of the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sin.

As we celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday, it might be helpful to think of how we have labeled ourselves or others according to our failures rather than who we are through the eyes of Divine Mercy.

When we know ourselves as forgiven, then we can receive the gift of peace Christ offers. This is one gift we receive in confession — hearing that our sins are forgiven and that we are invited to go in peace.

Having experienced vertical transcendence, then we are free to seek horizontal transcendence, the unifying love that makes a community of believers “of one heart and mind,”. In other words, when we are transformed by the mercy we receive from God, then we become capable of living mercifully.

