**SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER**

**Divine Mercy**

**1st Reading: Acts 2:42-47**

**As a sign of their faith the early Christians shared their possessions**

(The community of believers) devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**Responsorial: Psalm 117: 2-4, 13-15, 22-24**

**Response: Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting**

Let the sons of Israel say:
‘His love has no end.’
Let the sons of Aaron say:
‘His love has no end.’
Let those who fear the Lord say:
‘His love has no end.’

I was thrust, thrust down
and falling but the Lord was my helper.
The Lord is my strength and my song;
he was my saviour.
There are shouts of joy and victory
in the tents of the just.

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the corner stone.
This is the work of the Lord,
a marvel in our eyes.
This day was made by the Lord;
we rejoice and are glad.

**2nd Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-9**

**Christians respond to his resurrection with hope, praise and joy**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith-being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire-may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

**Gospel: John 20:19-31**

**The presence of the risen Jesus dispels fear and brings peace to his friends**

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

**Reflections:**

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.

