

Today is the Second Sunday of Easter, the Sunday within the Octave of Easter. An Octave is a period of eight days that extends a liturgical feast beyond a 24 hour day. At one time, the Church recognized nearly 20 particular feast days with octaves. In our current calendar, there are only two: The octaves of Christmas and Easter.

And so, in case you missed it, the last week was all Easter all the time.

Today is also known as Divine Mercy Sunday. This designation is of a more recent origin - dating from the 1930s. Where according to the visions of Saint Faustina Kowalska, Jesus appeared to this nun and told her to write things down. Part of her visions was that Jesus wanted to create a movement to make people more aware of His great mercy.

Pope Saint John Paul II promoted this feast and extended it to the entire Church. And today Pope Francis has announced an Extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy that will begin on December 8 of this year,

*“as a moment for the entire Church to spread the word of God’s forgiveness.”*

This is all very appropriate. After all, we spent the last 40 days of Lent praying “Kyrie Eleison” - which is Greek for “Lord have Mercy.” Throughout Lent, we prayed Psalm 51, *“Have mercy on me God in your kindness.”* And so, now that we have completed Lent ... what do we do with all that mercy?

Today’s readings present us with three images of mercy.

The reading from the Acts of the Apostles shows the early Church living out the Love of God as a united community. Sadly, over a couple thousand years, not only has the Church been rent by schism and heresy but even within the Church there are so-called divisions that call to mind political movements and party affiliations.

Yet mercy calls us to unity - not to division. Let us pray that we may be *“of one heart and [one] mind”* in showing forth the one mercy of the one true God.

The second reading from the First Letter of Saint John, speaks of our relationship with God.

Indeed, if we have become divided from each other, than most probably we are divided in some way from God. If we truly possess the unity of Faith, Hope, and Love in the Church, this will manifest itself in our unity with God.

St. John refers to this unity with God as “*the victory that conquers the world*” and, indeed, the world is conquered by God and Jesus Christ. If, however, we are separated from God, then we will unfortunately find ourselves on the wrong side of the battle.

Mercy, then, calls us to reconcile with God as well as with each other.

Finally, we hear in the Gospel, the familiar story of doubting Thomas.

Jesus shows up in the midst of the disciples. And what does he say?

“*Hey! Where were you guys? You all ran away?*”

No. He doesn't say that.

Does he call out Peter for denying Him during His passion?

No. He doesn't say that.

Rather, Our Lord says: “*Peace be with you.*”

And He gives the Apostles the power to bind and loose sins through the Holy Spirit. The same power that is held in the Sacrament of Reconciliation ... Penance ... Confession.

After this, Thomas comes in and won't believe the story. And then 8 days later - what would be a week after Easter ... today ... Jesus appears again.

Does He beat up Thomas for being stubborn?

No. He doesn't.

He says, “*Peace be with you.*”

And then, gives Thomas what he asked for - presenting His hands and His side so that Thomas can move from unbelief to belief.

The mercy of God, shown forth in the Person of Jesus Christ, moves us deeper into Faith, and brings us God's peace.

Not condemnation. Not judgment. Not punishment.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ; let us pray that God's mercy may act in us and through us. So that we may manifest the fruits of mercy in our lives by (1) unity within the Church ... as we are merciful to one another, (2) victory in God and Jesus Christ as we receive His mercy in Faith, Hope, and Love; and (3) the peace of God - “*which surpasses all understanding*” - as we encounter God's mercy in the Person of Jesus Christ in the Sacraments.