

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 the Missal we are using, there are only three: The octaves of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost.

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. Pope Francis announced an Extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy that will begin on December 8 of this year. In the Bulla promulgated yesterday, he said:

*“We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it..”*

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 Scriptures present us with two images of mercy.

The First Epistle of Saint John, speaks of our unity with God.

However, if we have become divided from each other, than most probably we are separated in some way from God. If we truly possess the unity of Faith, Hope, and Love through Grace, this unity through Grace will manifest itself in living within the mercy of 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 in order that we might be victorious with Christ.

In today's the Gospel, we hear the familiar story of doubting Thomas.

Jesus shows up in the midst of the disciples, and says: "*Peace be with you.*"

Our Lord does not chide them for their cowardice or for their weakness in the face of His passion. Instead, through the immense mercy of God, He offers them His peace.

Next He gives the Apostles the power to bind and loose sins through the Holy Spirit. The same power that is held in sacramental Confession ... the power of God's Divine mercy ... revealed through His Son ... in that great Sacrament of Divine Mercy

When Thomas arrives later, he won't believe the apostles' story.

But then 8 days later - what would be a week after Easter ... that is, today ... Jesus appears to His apostles - including Thomas.

And despite Thomas' stubbornness, Our Lord says, "*Peace be with you.*" There is no condemnation for Thomas' lack of faith.

Rather, Our Lord gives Thomas what he asked for - presenting His hands and His side so that Thomas can move out of unbelief and into supernatural Faith.

Such is the mercy of God - reaching out to those who struggle to live out Faith, Hope, and Love. An ocean of mercy is poured forth to redeem us.

The mercy of God, shown forth in the Person of Jesus Christ, always moves us deeper into the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love; and brings us the gift of God's peace - a peace we cannot find in the world.

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 living out Christ's victory as we receive His mercy and are reconciled with God in Christ; ultimately receiving His gift of peace. The peace of God - "*which surpasses all understanding*" - as we encounter God's mercy in the Person of Jesus Christ in Word and Sacrament.