

2nd (QA&SJ) Sunday of Easter Year B

In today's Gospel the disciples showed us their different reactions to Jesus' appearance after His resurrection. To assure them of His merciful love Jesus gave them His first gift—greeting them “*Peace be with you*”, driving out all fears and doubts. On the first day of Easter the women ran away from the tomb because they were frightened and they said nothing for they were afraid. And the rest of the disciples didn't believe it when they were told that Jesus is alive. Even the news brought by Mary Magdalene on that first Easter morning about the Lord's appearance to her did not convince them that he has risen. Even Simon Peter and John the beloved apostle had found an empty tomb. They remained in their fear. As the gospel described, “*the disciples are huddled behind locked doors, 'for fear of the Jews'*”, and also... *Jesus!* Probably they were not at peace after their master's death because they knew what they had done. They have reason to fear the risen Jesus. They were unfaithful and cowardly during Jesus' passion and death. They could not stay awake to pray with him at Gethsemane. They ran and hid when the Roman guards came to arrest Jesus. Peter had declared at the Last Supper that he would lay down his life for Jesus, but when confronted, thrice

denied being a disciple of Jesus. Except for John, the disciples were nowhere to be found at the foot of the cross.

Though the door is locked, Jesus appears to the fearful disciples. Perhaps they expected He will scold them for their cowardice. Jesus instead greets them, “*peace be with you*”. His words are statements of forgiveness, peace and mercy. *The disciples are forgiven-even before they can ask for forgiveness!* Jesus then showed them his hands and his side, repeats his greeting of peace and sends them on a mission. He breathed on them and said, “*Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.*” Having experienced divine mercy, the disciples are now entrusted with the ministry of *reconciliation and forgiveness of sins.*

Interestingly, St. John provides a close-up image of Thomas and adds a lesson, connecting the resurrection event to our present time. Thomas is a loyalist of Jesus. He said to his fellow disciples, “*Let us also go to Jerusalem with Jesus that we may die with him.*” We hear him questioning Jesus about his destination and the way to it, to which Jesus responded, “*I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father, but through me.*” With such an intimate relationship with Jesus it is not surprising that Thomas, who

was not present on that evening, would express doubt and challenge the testimony of his brothers. So a week later when Thomas was with his brothers, Jesus appears and greets them a third time, "*Peace be with you*". The same gift of forgiveness, peace and mercy is extended to Thomas. He wants proof, so Jesus gives him proof. He did not remain in his doubt when he was confronted with reality. There was no more need for Him to touch & feel Jesus' side. Like Thomas, many of us are gripped not only of *doubts but fears as well*. These two negative feelings rob us of true peace. Fear is the greatest stumbling block to peace and good relationships. *The best way to deal with doubt is to believe*. Believe that God loves you no matter what. Believe that you are lovable. *And believe that those, whom you love, love you!* Thomas may be late in believing, but responds with one of the best professions of faith, "*My Lord and my God*" a prayer priests inaudibly utter during consecration.

Since May 2000, the Second Sunday of Easter is also *Divine Mercy Sunday*. On this Divine Mercy Sunday instead of focusing on our sinfulness, anger, resentment, bitterness that are burdening our hearts, *we are invited to savor God's mercy*. The truth is God's mercy precedes our sins: because of the saving work of Jesus, we are forgiven long before we

even think of sinning. God only waits for us to claim the mercy already prepared for us. Think of this - most parents do this all the time. Parents look on their newborn child in all his or her innocence. They know their child will make mistakes - *even some big time mistakes*— that will one day hurt them deeply. But they build no wall of protection between them and their child. Their love, like God’s love, stands ready ahead of time, ready to forgive whatever hurt their child may bring even before the hurt comes.

During Holy Mass we make present the Lord’s Supper, a meal Jesus shared with his disciples on the night before he died, knowing only hours later they would betray, deny, and abandon him. Like the disciples we come & gather together to celebrate this paschal mystery. *Let us not ask Jesus to put our finger and our hand into his wounds but put His hand into our hearts to heal us.* When we are healed of *our doubts and our hurts*, then we will be able to reach out and heal others by *teaching them with what we believe and practice what we teach.* **In faith, love, and God’s grace, let us claim our own share of that divine mercy which the heart of the risen Lord has in abundance for us all. It is with God’s mercy that we can live in peace and rest in peace. Amen.**