

“Divine Mercy Sunday”
Second Sunday of Easter
Our Lady of Dallas Abbey
April 15, 2012
Br. Lawrence Brophy
Gospel: John 20:19-31

In 2000 John Paul II designated the Sunday after Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday. So it would make sense for us to meditate on God’s abundant mercy, and our absolute need for it, but the long lines for Confession during Holy Week made it clear that a great many of us take our relationship with God seriously: we want to be better people, but we know that continue to sin, so we continue to acknowledge our failings and ask for forgiveness. Which means we go to the sacrament of reconciliation because, as we read in the gospel this morning, that is how God wants us to encounter his mercy. Also, there seems to be no need to speak much about mercy today since with the start of finals at UD is less than 3 weeks from today, we will have several reminders in the coming month of our need for all kinds of mercy.

Feeling reasonably confident God’s mercy will remain an important concern for us in the coming weeks, we might draw some profit by focusing on the drama that unfolds in the gospel: the drama surrounding the Doubting Thomas. Thomas has the bad luck of stepping out for a bit on Easter evening, and missing Christ’s first appearance to the apostles. And the stage is set for a powerful conflict. It’s not that Thomas kind of doesn’t believe what the other apostles tell him. He cannot believe them. He won’t believe them. He doesn’t believe them, and there’s nothing they can do to convince him otherwise. His words are amazing: “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” That is a serious proof. Thomas’s declaration is striking, especially when we consider that he is an apostle. Thomas saw Jesus walk on water, calm the storm, multiply the loaves. He was there when Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb, and the formerly dead Lazarus hobbled out of the tomb still bound by the burial cloths. Yet Thomas who had seen all this, and now hears the testimony of men he’s lived and traveled with for the better part of 3 years won’t believe Christ is risen unless he sees the nailmarks and touches the wounds.

We’re left asking ourselves, why won’t he believe? There seem to be 2 main difficulties. First, the disciples are saying something new has happened. This is not a repeat of what happened with Lazarus, for Lazarus was called back to a natural life. Here the apostles proclaim

that Jesus has risen from the dead, and he's not going to die again. This is what we celebrate every Sunday. God raised Jesus from the dead, and in doing so He broke death's power over us. This is a scandalous message. The apostles and we following after them declare that death is not final. Despite appearances there is life after death. And we know this because of that singular event in human history, Christ's resurrection. Thomas is right. This is an outrageous claim: there is more to life than this world. It requires some proof. But there's a second aspect of Thomas's words that we ought to listen to, and a corresponding second aspect to the scandal Christianity. Thomas focuses on the wounds of Jesus. If the resurrection was a scandal to the Greeks, it was the suffering Messiah that was such a scandal to the Jews. Thomas wants to see the wounds because he wants to make sense of the brutal torture and death of Jesus. If the resurrected Christ has no wounds, then how do we make sense of his suffering? Thomas wants to see that the man who rose is the man who was scourged at the pillar, taunted by the soldiers, crucified, and was pierced. Thankfully, the signs of these events do remain on the risen body of Christ, and through the resurrection human suffering has meaning. One of my favorite characterizations of heaven ...says that "all the bad things are gone, all the good things are here." The beauty and the strength of Christianity is that the wounds Christ suffered for us are part of the good things.

Christ transcends these scandals. On the Sunday the week after Easter when Jesus again reveals himself to his disciples, one of the most powerful scenes in John's gospel unfolds. Thomas sees that the man who died is the same as the one who is risen. And I love that the evangelist leaves room for our imagination. There's no mention of Thomas inspecting the wounds of Christ, and I like to imagine that when confronted by the presence of his crucified and risen Lord, Thomas can do nothing but fall to his knees in homage. In such proximity to love itself, the need for measurement and documentation fades away. In the presence of love, the scandals fade away, and everything makes sense. Love is its own proof.

This story moves and inspires us because it shows us a man who overcomes his unwillingness to believe in Christ's resurrection through an incredible outpouring of grace, an intimate meeting with the risen Lord. Another beautiful thing about Christianity is that the mass gives US the opportunity for this same encounter. We have no reason to be jealous of Thomas. The risen Christ comes to us with his wounded body this morning as well. In the Eucharist we encounter the risen Christ, body and soul. He makes himself present to be our spiritual food. And

we, like Thomas, have an opportunity to fall on our knees, recognize Christ in the sacrifice of the altar and worship him as our Lord and our God.

Fr. Philip:

As witnesses of the resurrection, the apostles were sent forth to continue the work of Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us pray for the mission of the Church and the needs of the world.

Lawrence:

1. For Pope Benedict, that he may continue to guide the Church as she professes her faith in the resurrection, let us pray to the Lord.
 2. For the American Bishops, that they may continue to lead us in the struggle for our religious liberty and may they find many willing allies in their fight, let us pray to the Lord.
 3. For our community, that God may inspire those who have been blessed with more to serve Christ by giving from their abundance to help those in need, let us pray to the Lord.
 4. In thanksgiving for Abbot Peter's recent benediction, that God may make him a blessing for our community, let us pray to the Lord.
 5. For all who have died that they may experience God's mercy and rise in Christ to eternal life, let us pray to the Lord.
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Fr. Philip:

As your people continue the work
of the apostolic witness,
We ask you, Loving Father,
To grant our petitions
through Christ our Lord.