

Divine Mercy Sunday/ April 11-12, 2015
Easter 2B/ Cathedral of Saint Paul
Readings: Acts 4:32-35; 1 John 5:1-6; John 20:19-31

Today is Divine Mercy Sunday and we are still basking in the glow from Easter last Sunday, and the entire experience of the Sacred Triduum. These are such blessed times, and yet in Her wisdom the Church presents to us for our reflection today the reality of our own sin and doubt, realities that too easily obscure the beauty of the Easter event.

Last night at St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Francis inaugurated a Year of Mercy with the promulgation of a papal bull called "Misericordiae Vultus," the indicating an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. He did so in the presence of the prelates gathered in Rome and the lay faithful who attended the Vespers Service. The Jubilee document, aside from indicating the duration, opening and closing dates, and the main ways in which the Holy Year will unfold, constitutes the basic document for understanding the spirit in which it was convoked, as well as Pope Francis' intentions and the fruit he hopes the Year will bear.

Today, the Church puts before us the figure of Saint Thomas, great patron saint of India, who spent himself in the service of the Gospel, and yet for too long has been associated with one act of doubt in the midst of a life of faith and service. The darkness obscures the light all too often, and in a flash the good we do can seemingly be washed away.

We know too well that reputation can be fickle and fleeting. Thomas' time of doubt, brief as it was, has forever branded him in some people's minds. This is sad, and it is not particularly fair to this great saint. Thankfully, the Lord looks differently upon each of us. He sees the entirety of our lives. This is not denying the reality that one serious sin, for one mortally sinful transgression could in fact cause us to lose our salvation.

But it is equally true that because the Lord sees all, He is able to judge us fairly and in complete justice. Still, we need His mercy, for none of us is just before the Lord without His love and grace. We need to call out to Him. The purpose of the year of Mercy is to highlight this superabundance of God's grace to those who sincerely ask of it. The year begins Dec. 8, 2015, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, and ends on Nov. 20, 2016, the feast of Christ the King. Various events will be prepared between now and the formal beginning of the year.

Last month, when announcing his intentions for this Year of Mercy at a Lenten Penance Service, the Holy Father stated:

“I have often thought about how the Church might make clear its mission of being a witness to mercy...It is a journey that begins with a spiritual conversion. For this reason, I have decided to call an extraordinary jubilee that is to have the mercy of God at its center. It shall be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live this year in the light of the Lord's words: ‘Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful’ (Lk 6:36).”

What is the benefit of mercy? For one thing, we can look to mercy as the antidote to the many troubles that fester in our hearts. When we hold onto grudges or past hurts, a merciful spirit can soothe that pain and transform those hurts by means of redemptive suffering.

If we are not at peace within, this will manifest itself elsewhere. We will be restless, taking it out on those whom we love the most—because we do not fear losing them. We think to ourselves, “They will put up with my moods—they know that this is how I am.” This is dangerous thinking—it shows how we take other's love for granted.

Sr. Faustina, the first saint of the new millennium, related that in her visions that form the basis of Divine Mercy Sunday that Jesus taught her to be merciful with others first. Twice in today's Gospel Jesus said, "Peace be with you." It is more than a greeting at Mass celebrated by a bishop; it is a sincere hope for the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Without this inner peace, we are lost. We will never be happy.

A simple Polish nun who mostly worked in the gardens and the kitchen of her convent was blessed by the Lord with extraordinary gifts of grace to know the depths of God's mercy. Let us pray for the grace to take to heart her simple message of mercy- 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.'

Mercy obtains charity; charity promotes mercy. In the immediate aftermath of a beautiful Easter, let us keep the Spirit ever strong and vibrant in our families and in this parish.