

HIS MERCY ENDURES FOREVER

*Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, His mercy endures forever.
Let the house of Israel say, His mercy endures forever
Let the house of Aaron say, His mercy endures forever
Let those who fear the Lord say, His mercy endures forever. (Psalm 118)*

These beautiful words of the Psalmist reiterate the theme of the season as we continue to celebrate the Death and Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ who died for us while we were still sinners. For his love for humankind he has shown his mercy, and his mercy is everlasting.

The life of the early Church exemplified a 'community of believers'. They lived and shared everything together as 'of one heart and mind'. This spirit of sharing made them have everything in common and 'no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own'. In other words, this early community of Christians put into action the love they heard from the teachings of Christ that was made available to them through the apostles. There was no distinction between the rich and the poor. There was no needy person in their midst because there was generosity, sharing, mutual trust as some fruits of the witness the apostles bore of the resurrection of Christ. What we see in this early Christian community, the Church of the Apostles immediately after the resurrection of Jesus is faith in-action based on the corporal works of mercy. There was practical mutual help and support.

Such help and support may have taken a new dimension among us today. We could be suspicious to relive that spirit that guided the lives of these early Christians. In a world where Capitalism is the acceptable operational ideology, things of this nature, may be viewed with some suspicion and understood as Socialism or 'Welfarism.' The ideal propagated by this early Christian community is in all respects applauded, but at the same time, in our world and age it assumes a question of scrutiny. The sheer fear of even distribution and the support for those we think may have caused their indigence and poverty by some act of self-negligence or careless behavior tries to truncate the need for our Christian action. But then, in corporal works of mercy, there are no blames, but only action that is required. Therefore, the Church and her members have continued to call for and give support to the poor people in our communities and in our world. Mother Theresa in recent times led a war against the poor of the poor. Her religious movement continues to be relevant in our age where there is so much divide along the lines of the poor and the wealthy.

John reminds the Christian faithful in the Second Reading of their common meaning as begotten children of God. Supposedly, as begotten children of God, we must love God and obey his commandments. We have a mission to conquer the world through the spiritual works of mercy. As Saint Francis prays, "where there is hatred, let me sow love, where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; and where there is darkness, light..." These seeds of mercy and love strengthen our relationship with God. For indeed, this is what the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross means for us, to conquer the world of hatred and antagonism, the world of selfishness and greed, the world of pain and resentment with his love and patience. We have already been condemned, but his death on the cross redeems us and pours upon us the abundance of his mercy. This may not have been immediately understood if not that he resurrected and shows himself to his apostles and disciples.

The encounter we read in this weekend's gospel reflects the very thing in the heart of the risen Lord, and that is Peace. The peace the world cannot give, the peace we have lost as a result of sin, the peace we seek, but wrongly; this is the peace Jesus brings to his disciples in the evening of that first day of the week. The true peace goes with the remission of sins. Jesus died for our sins, but knowing the need of this sinful humanity, he gives the Church the greatest gift which is the power to forgive the sins of one another; truly, it is an exclusive prerogative of the Son: "As the Father has sent me so, I send you". He breathes on them and gives them the Holy Spirit, "Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

Jesus having instituted the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, of his Body and Blood before his death now, institutes the Sacrament of Reconciliation. These sacraments represent with that of baptism a spiritual rebirth of the person who stands before the holy God, as the Scripture says, "Be holy for I am holy."

In fact, Jesus challenges us with his action. Thomas doubted everything as many of us still do today. Thomas' doubt led to a most profound adoration of the risen Lord by his confession of faith, "My Lord and my God". Jesus did not reprimand him. He included him also in the blessedness. Thomas thus, represents the blessedness of the people of faith who have not seen and have believed. Our conversion is important to Christ and when we do convert and confess, he receives us with his unimaginable mercy. The mercy that is poured out for our regeneration still flows and it is immeasurable and inconceivable. On the cross, the side of Jesus was pierced with a lance from which flowed blood and water; the blood of the Eucharist and the waters of baptism which was immediately recognized by the gospel. However, over time, it seems we have cared less to recognize its significance in our lives as Christians. This sign of his mercy was poured upon the world for the remission of our sins. It has continued to flow in a most mystic way since that fateful Good Friday.

So, the Church this weekend celebrates the Divine Mercy Sunday in honor of Jesus' enduring mercy. The Church has selected this special Sunday following our celebration of the Lord's resurrection as Divine Mercy Sunday at the instance of Sr. Faustina's encounter with the Lord in which he instructed it to be so. Reading the *Diary* of Sr Faustina Kowalska, it says, "My image is already in your soul. I desire that there be a Feast of Mercy. I want this image, which you will paint with a brush, to be solemnly blessed on the first Sunday after Easter; that Sunday is to be the Feast of Mercy."

This image we have in our churches today will keep reminding us of the abundant outpouring of God's mercy in our lives. The Lord has asked Sr. Faustina of three things: To pray for souls, entrusting them to God's incomprehensible mercy; to tell the world about God's generous mercy; and to start a new movement in the Church focusing on God's mercy.

These things challenge our ineptitude to the mercy which is given us but which we have severally failed to make use of. If there is anything, it is that God is still compassionate and loving and merciful to a world that crucified him and still crucifies him with its sins, but then, we are called to the hope that the Lord's mercy endures forever. "Let those who fear the Lord say, His mercy endures forever".

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