

April 19, 2009

Divine Mercy Sunday

Reading 1

[Acts 4:32-35](#)

The community of believers was of one heart and mind,
and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own,
but they had everything in common.

With great power the apostles bore witness
to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus,
and great favor was accorded them all.

There was no needy person among them,
for those who owned property or houses would sell them,
bring the proceeds of the sale,
and put them at the feet of the apostles,
and they were distributed to each according to need.

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24](#)

R. (1) Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

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."

R. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

I was hard pressed and was falling,
but the LORD helped me.
My strength and my courage is the LORD,
and he has been my savior.

The joyful shout of victory
in the tents of the just:

R. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.

By the LORD has this been done;
it is wonderful in our eyes.

This is the day the LORD has made;
let us be glad and rejoice in it.

R. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

Reading II

[1 Jn 5:1-6](#)

Beloved:

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God,
and everyone who loves the Father
loves also the one begotten by him.

In this way we know that we love the children of God
when we love God and obey his commandments.

For the love of God is this,
that we keep his commandments.

And his commandments are not burdensome,
for whoever is begotten by God conquers the world.

And the victory that conquers the world is our faith.

Who indeed is the victor over the world
but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is the one who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ,
not by water alone, but by water and blood.

The Spirit is the one that testifies,
and the Spirit is truth.

Gospel

[Jn 20:19-31](#)

On the evening of that first day of the week,
when the doors were locked, where the disciples were,
for fear of the Jews,

Jesus came and stood in their midst
and said to them, "Peace be with you."

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them,

"Receive the Holy Spirit.

Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them,

and whose sins you retain are retained."

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve,
was not with them when Jesus came.

So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord."

But he said to them,

"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."

Now a week later his disciples were again inside
and Thomas was with them.
Jesus came, although the doors were locked,
and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you."
Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands,
and bring your hand and put it into my side,
and do not be unbelieving, but believe."
Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!"
Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me?
Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples
that are not written in this book.
But these are written that you may come to believe
that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

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HOMILY

What we celebrate this weekend is Divine Mercy Sunday – a day when we focus especially on God forgiving love / love that overcomes doubts and fears. A day when we lift up the example of Thomas and the answer to the question: Can there be a tomorrow? Yet today it is important to distinguish between doubt and cynicism. Today is a day to celebrate how God sees us –as his children, talented, and loved beyond measure. This week it seems that our culture has been gripped by someone who has overcome, fears and doubts – someone who was formerly invisible has become visible. A person and situation that makes clear the difference between doubt and cynicism. Cynicism is characterized by pessimism, derision and sarcasm, whereas doubt is characterized by hesitation uncertainty and a pause. So I have to ask you Church: Have you seen the video of the woman called Susan Boyle singing on the American Idol like show called "Britain's Got Talent?" She is a wonderful example of how God sees us--and the way that the world often doesn't.

A quick sketch...Ms. Boyle, a matronly 48-year-old unemployed woman, who touchingly described herself on camera as "never been married, never been kissed," is from a small Scottish village living in the apartment where she was raised, with her cat, Pebbles. A devout Catholic, she had spent the last several years caring for her ailing mother, who recently died at age 91. When she strode onto the stage of "Britain's Got Talent," you could see the contemptuous grimaces in the crowd – full of skepticism and doubt. And when the heavysset woman smilingly announced that she would sing the vocally challenging song from "Les Miserables" called "I Dreamed a Dream," you could see the judges literally roll their eyes / steeped in cynicism / barely disguising their disgust / Oh Please!

Yet when Ms. Boyle opened her mouth, out came a voice that silenced the cynicism of her judges. We were deeply touched / just as Thomas was deeply touched / and doubt vanishes. The uncanny resonance of the lyrics of her chosen song, for someone who seems to be travelling through a tough patch of life: "I dreamed a dream in time gone by/ When hope was high,/ And life worth living/I dreamed that love would never die/ I dreamed that God would be forgiving." But there may be something else that accounts for our delight, and for the nearly hundreds of millions others watching it on Youtube. There is something else that is worth celebrating on this Divine Mercy Sunday. The new eyes with which we see Susan Boyle is very nearly the way God sees us: worthwhile, special, talented, unique, beautiful. It was the way Christ looks at Thomas, a look of love that draws him out from his doubting. The world generally looks askance at people like Susan Boyle, if it sees them at all. Without classic good looks, without work, without a spouse, living in a small town, certainly not a pretty young thing –people like Susan Boyle may not seem particularly "important" but there is a tomorrow for her as she perhaps never dreamt of before.

This resurrection story like each gospel resurrection story invites us to accept at least the possibility that there is Each resurrection story invites us to accept at least the possibility that there is an incomprehensibly bigger, brighter, richer reality than we can readily discern. Can there be a tomorrow? The Resurrection says YES – the resurrection says there is no more room for fear or doubt – I am here with you! The resurrection tells us that the limitations we feel about our situations, ourselves and our struggles are held in something much larger. That is the

GOOD NEWS! It is clear, in every resurrection story, that none of the disciples *expected* the resurrection—no matter how many times Jesus had promised it, even though he'd raised others. There are so many examples: Mary's exclaiming in the garden through her tear "teacher!," /The beloved disciples ducking into the cave seeing the cloth "rolled up by itself", he seeing and believing. So what about Thomas—he walks into a room and his pals all tell him they've just been talking to Jesus, who died a week ago, and he cynically says, "Right, and I just walked home with Moses - pretty cruel joke, guys." YET Thomas grasped the ungraspable when he touched the crust of Jesus scars and declares "My Lord and my God." Can there be a tomorrow after what we have seen? The resurrection is God's Yes – God's ultimate Good News for us!

Often we think it was probably easier for the disciples. After all, they actually saw and ate with and felt Jesus's flesh **after** he died. They stood by and gaped as Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, healed lepers, turned water into wine. I don't know about you, but if I'd been standing next to Jesus when he turned water into wine, my first helpless reaction would probably been, "How the heck did you **do** that?" It defies all the laws of chemistry. And if Jesus had turned to me with a benign smile and said, "Well, it's really rather easy, you see. I'm God." Being a doubter myself I probably would have said "So long, Jesus!"

Faith in the Resurrection must be much deeper than at the simplistic level of "just have faith". Language offers us a clue. Notice the difference when I say "just have faith" and when we say "I believe" or something like "I just knew at the core of my being, or perhaps – I felt it profoundly." Can you remember a moment when "it all clicked into place" a deep down incontestable kinda feeling, beyond logic, incapable of explanation or need for it? That is what I hear in today's gospel – just like for Mary Magdalene crying out from her heart "Teacher", or the Emmaus travelers with "burning hearts."

Can you remember the weekend Jack Kennedy was executed, the day of the Twin Towers, perhaps more personally the moment the oncologist said "cancer." From somewhere in the depth of our person – we felt the question rise up - Can there be a tomorrow? When our hopes are dashed to pieces and our nerve has failed, can anyone restore the music? The resurrection gives us God's "Yes!" The pages of these gospel stories flutter the answer into our palms: The cynics do not have the last word, Life is not one splotch of light on the face of endless darkness / on the contrary / life is one *brief* patch of grey on a savannah of infinite light."

Christ's words repeatedly after the resurrection are "peace be with you". And today we will offer that peace to each other and then we will lift our hearts (I love that prayer) So we come to this altar with our fears and longings, and like Susan Boyle know that our little bit will be more than enough, we need to trust that Christ will take even our seeking for that which is perishable and turn it to seeking HIM. So as we speak the word Amen / we say Yes! Yes, the resurrection makes a difference; yes the resurrection answers our doubts and exposes our cynicism. Yes we are an Easter People, a Eucharistic people. Yes, we are Eucharist for one another. Yes, there is a tomorrow and our definitive answer is AMEN!

Joseph Carver, S.J.