

Homily for Divine Mercy Sunday (2nd Sunday of Easter – 11th April 2021)

By Fr. Jerome Ituah, OCD

Readings: Acts 4:32-35; Ps 117(118); 1 Jn 5:1-6; Jn 20:19-31

Theme: God's mercy as the bedrock for communal life

The divine mercy devotion goes back to the apparitions of Jesus to Sister Faustina Kowalska, which she wrote in her diary between 1934 and 1938. Pope Saint John Paul II promoted the Divine Mercy devotion during his pontificate. He declared the second Sunday of Easter, the Divine Mercy Sunday on 30th April 2000, during Blessed Faustina's Canonisation. The divine mercy devotion emphasises the merciful love of God, which made him give his only son for the redemption of the world. From Sr. Faustina's diary, we read, 'Humanity will not find peace until it turns trustfully to divine mercy.'

Peace and mercy are closely linked (cf. Jer 16:5; Gal 6:16; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; 1Jn 1:3; Jude 1:2). *Eleos*, mercy is an attitude and emotion that moves someone to compassion, sympathy, and pity. It is an attitude of care and concern for the wellbeing of the other person. Where there is mercy, there is peace, and peace and love lead to harmonious living. Love distinguishes us as the children of God, and through it, we overcome the world, as St. John tells us in the second reading. Communal life cannot survive where there is no love, peaceful co-existence and concrete acts of mercy. In his homily, during the Canonisation of Blessed Faustina, Pope John Paul II said, 'In the various readings (of today), the liturgy seems to indicate the path of mercy which, re-establishing the relationship of each person with God, also creates new relations of fraternal solidarity among human beings.'

Today's gospel focuses on one of the appearances of Jesus to his disciples. During the passion, many of the disciples deserted Jesus and flee. At the appearances of Jesus to them, they would have felt bad for their action. The same day of the resurrection in the evening, after Mary Magdalene had told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, Jesus appeared to the disciples. The doors were locked because they were still afraid of the Jews. Jesus said to them εἰρήνη ὑμῖν (in Greek), '*shalom lachem*' (in Hebrew) peace be with you. The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Then He said to them again, *shalom lachem!*

For Jesus to tell them *shalom*, means that He did not hold anything against them. He demonstrated his mercy to them by offering them *shalom*, the gift of peace. *Shalom*, in Hebrew, is a wish for the physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing of the person. The wish of Jesus carries with it his loving mercy and forgiveness, which he also wants them to extend to other people. Jesus then breathed on them and bequeathed on them the Holy Spirit, giving them the power to forgive sins and retain sins. Breathing on them reminds us of God's action of breathing into the nostrils of man, which made man a living being (cf. Gen 2:7). Jesus breathes new life into the disciples to restore them to life. It was as if they were dead after the whole passion event. Thomas was not there when Jesus came on the evening of that day. He refused to believe when the others told him that they had seen the Lord. For the sake of Thomas, eight days later, Jesus appeared to them again, out of his mercy, to restore Thomas' life and increase his faith. Once again, he offered them *shalom* and spoke directly to Thomas. The appearance of Jesus moved Thomas from his faithlessness to the highest level of faith. Thomas did not only then confess Jesus as the son of God (cf. Matt 16:16), but as *ho kyrios mou kai ho theos mou* MY LORD AND MY GOD. This is the only time someone confessed Jesus as God in the New Testament.

In our first reading, we see the Christian community living out the mercy they had received from God. The whole group of believers was concerned about each member of the community's welfare because they were united in heart and soul. There was love among them and concern for the common good. No one was in want, and people who had so much sold their properties to ensure that everyone was comfortable. There is a great challenge in our

world today. Many people lack empathy, sympathy and compassion towards others to the point that they can even take what belongs to others, see them suffering and still feel comfortable. And these people still preach peaceful co-existence. There can be no true peace where there is no love and forgiveness, compassion for others, justice, equity and fair distribution of resources. There will be an increased level of peace in families, societies and the world when people enjoy a state of physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing.