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*Pastor, St. Michael the Archangel*

*Divine Mercy Sunday - Year A (April 19, 2020)*

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It has been nearly 20 years now since the Canonization of St. Faustina Kowalska by Pope Saint John Paul II. At that Mass on April 30, 2000, he also proclaimed that the Second Sunday of Easter would now be called “Divine Mercy Sunday.” He states in his homily that in “the various readings, the liturgy seems to indicate the path of mercy which, while re-establishing the relationship of each person with God, also created new relations of fraternal solidarity among human beings.” And indeed, the readings we have been listening to each day of the Easter Octave, which concludes on this day, point to an encounter with the Lord for each of us to ponder as we experience his love and mercy in the context of the joy of his Resurrection.

John the Evangelist tells us that Jesus “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’” (John 20:22-23). Archbishop Sheen, whom I have been drawing on in my Lenten/Easter Catechesis, reflects on this Gospel passage for today. First, he states “As He [God] has breathed into Adam the breath of natural life, so now He Breathed into His Apostles, the foundation of His Church, the breath of spiritual life. As man became the image of God in virtue of the soul that was breathed into him, so now they became the image of Christ as the power of the Spirit was breathed into them” (Chapter 55: “The Doors Being Closed”). This connection with the Breath of God into the old Adam and the Breath of God coming forth from the New Adam, that is from the Son of God, is seen as a “as a new creation as the first fruit of the Redemption” (Sheen. *Ibid.*).

With this breath would come a power, an authority, as it were, to act in the name of the Lord; that is the power to forgive sins, an experience of mercy. And the exercise of this mercy, the Apostles, and those who would follow through the grace of ordination, are entrusted to give out to those in need for the salvation of souls. This power would ensure that the sanctifying mission of the Church, given by Christ, would be ever present in the world. “From that day on, the remedy for human sin and guilt was to be a humble confession to one having authority to forgive. To be humble on one’s knees confessing to one to whom Christ gave the power to forgive (rather than prostrate on a couch to hear guilt explained away)—that was one of the greatest joys given to the burdened soul of man” (Sheen, *Ibid.*).

Sheen also notes an important fact that would happen in the following scene. Thomas the Apostle was not with the other ten when Our Lord appeared to them the first time in the Upper Room. When he was told by them that they had seen the Lord, 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”” (John 20:25). On this, Sheen notes that “Thomas did not say he refused to believe, but that he was unable to believe until he had some experimental proof of the

Resurrection” (Sheen, Chapter 56: “Fingers, Hands, and Nails”). “His...was not the frivolous skepticism of indifference or hostility to truth; he wanted knowledge in order to have faith”. (Sheen, *Ibid*).

More importantly, however, is the example that Jesus would give to the Apostles on how to apply this power of mercy as h would show to Thomas, and later, to Peter. “There was not the slightest trace of faultfinding in Our Lord, as there would not be the slightest trace of faultfinding with Peter at a later appearance by the Sea of Galilee” (Sheen, *Ibid*). Jesus did not seek to condemn either of them, but he sought nothing less than for them to experience mercy and forgiveness. This lessen how to show mercy is for all disciples. Even the greatest doubter can be transformed when shown mercy. And how does this affect Thomas? Thomas would then utter the words of truth that should always be ready on the lips of all who believe: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). This is humility before Our Lord: that we recognize him because we have met him and we know him as he has revealed himself to us, no matter how imperfect we may be. This is how we learn “the path of mercy which, while re-establishing the relationship of each person with God, also creat[es] new relations of fraternal solidarity among human beings” (See above).