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

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Christ is risen!

Brothers and sisters, I am a big fan of this Sunday because I think of it as *my* Sunday. It always upset me that people would hear my name and ask, “Doubting Thomas?” so as to make a joke. I think folks would often feel embarrassed when I would say yes. After all, he is my patron, and I feel much in common with him. And I think people misunderstand his story to be so able to make a joke out of it. Do we not find ourselves so often thinking like him?

Or perhaps it really is just me. Or perhaps it is more right to say that people come in all kinds. St. Peter was the kind of guy who would just blurt out what he was thinking, even if he hadn’t thought it through, even if no one else was thinking it at all. St. Thomas was the guy in the group who said what everyone else was thinking but was too afraid to say. When news came that Lazarus had died and Jesus said he was going back to Judaea, Thomas said “Let’s go die with him.” When Jesus is talking at the Last Supper about how everyone was going to follow him later, everyone is nodding along, really having no clue what he’s talking about. But Thomas says, “How can we follow after you? We don’t know where you’re going.” After the Resurrection, Thomas was away for some reason or another when Jesus appeared to the others. When Jesus had appeared to them, they were still a little incredulous. Jesus rebuked their disbelief. Now the guys tell Thomas what they saw, and one could forgive him thinking it was a late April Fools’ joke. When Thomas says, “Show me,” he isn’t claiming for himself anything the others didn’t expect. After all, NO ONE believed when the women came running from the tomb. None of the others was any better than he was. But Jesus uses the experience with him to make a point to the others and to us.

You see, the others might have gotten the same idea that we have, that they were just so great and perfect because they believed the Resurrection happened and they rejoiced in it. Jesus says, “Blessed are those who have not seen, and have believed.” Jesus knew that letting our faith rest on seeing makes our faith weaker. Why? Because so much more of the gap between us and God is filled—it shrinks faith’s role. Not that we shouldn’t rely on experience, but the focus we end up putting on experiences of God shoves faith out of the way. And faith is our trust in God. Faith must be our foundation. Jesus also knew that most people in history would have to rely on the word of others that everything they said about God was true—because God himself revealed it. It would be nice if Jesus would come and personally visit us and answer all our questions—proving to us the truth. But then where is faith? Where is our confidence in him to guide us through each moment of our lives?

Among other things, I think Jesus is reminding us of this dynamic in this time of separation. Jesus gave us the Sacraments as tangible signs of his abiding presence. However, to truly accept them for what they are, we must rely on faith. When we look at the Sacraments, the effects that they have ARE NOT perceptible to our senses. We hear words and we see, touch, taste material, and yet what is ACTUALLY happening is not tangible. We do

not see the sins of the baptized person washed away—we recognize that by faith. We do not see the Holy Spirit descend in Confirmation—we know it by faith. We do not see the man and wife become bound for life in marriage—we know it by faith. We mistake good feelings for the action of the Sacraments themselves.

I have often heard people comment how much they like to see what is happening on the altar during the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass. Let me tell you what there is to see in no uncertain terms—ABOSLUTELY NOTHING. It was for a long time the custom of the Church to completely hide the altar with a curtain at the most sacred moments. Though the practice fell into disuse, we do well to remember what a later St. Thomas said of this reality: “Sight, touch, taste are all deceived in their judgment of you, / But hearing suffices firmly to believe.” If we insist too much upon what we can see or feel, we lose sight of what the Sacraments invite us to—reliance by faith on the invisible realities that they contain.

Now in this time you find yourselves deprived even of the tangible aspects of the Sacraments. Let this be a challenge to see the Lord Jesus acting at each moment of every day in your lives. Invite him into every moment. Adore him, present in your heart and in the hearts of others. Make acts of faith in him and in the truths he has revealed. Unite your hearts to the Masses taking place which you do not see or hear. Rely on his mercy, and become a source of mercy for others through the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy. If you can recognize Jesus there, and make his presence felt in the lives of others, how much more will you recognize him in the sacraments when you return to them? How much more will God’s invisible grace fill you up and overflow from you? That, after all, is the purpose of the Sacraments.

I commend to you today the veneration of the Divine Mercy image. The blue and red streams from Jesus’ Heart are signs of cleansing and rebirth. This meaning is the critical element of the veneration of the image. Acknowledge the reality it communicates—Jesus extends his mercy to all of us. Mercy is his will for us. As long as we draw breath, and infinite treasury of blessings is available to us. Let us not be distracted by whatever context of pain or mistrust we find ourselves in. Let us repeat again and again, “Jesus, I trust in you.” Let us allow the mercy flowing from his heart to become a new deluge to cleanse the earth. If we welcome him, he will make all the difference in our world. Let us abandon our reliance upon our distrusting senses and give faith its proper place in our hearts. Let faith become the ground we walk upon rather than just the crutch that helps us walk. Let us then begin to run, to dance, to leap with joy in the Lord, who has destroyed death and given us life by his merciful love.