

# The Church of Saint Pascal Baylon

Fr. Mike Byron, Pastor: Sunday Homily

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Second Sunday of Easter

I love to imagine what might well have been the next subject of conversation for Jesus and his friends on that evening in the upper room, once we got the matter of Thomas' doubting straightened away. Presuming that the Lord didn't just vanish after encouraging Thomas to believe in the resurrection, I can picture Jesus turning to the rest of them and saying, "And what are *you* doing here? It's been a week now since I breathed out the Holy Spirit upon you, and here you sit. You haven't even gotten around to unlocking the door, I notice. I asked you to do one thing for me, in light of your awakening experience—no, I *commanded* you to do one thing. Remember? Here's what I told you on Easter Night: 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you. Go and announce the gift of forgiveness of sins, and tell the people what you have seen.' That's what I said, remember? But here you still are, right where I left you. It's as though nothing happened here at all last weekend. What are you waiting for? At least our friend Thomas here was right up front in saying what *he* was waiting for. He told you that he wasn't going to be convinced until he examined my physical wounds. I can understand that, and that's why I have returned—for his sake. But for the rest of you, how many visits do I need to make before you exit the building? How many times do I have to tell you what is expected of a believer? This is not Las Vegas: What happens in the Upper Room isn't supposed to stay in the Upper Room. And in fact, if it does, then you are of very little use to my mission. How many times do *you* need to see me before it makes any difference? For Thomas here, it is *one* time. He and you now possess all that you need. Now get out of here, and don't make me have to confront a locked door again!"

The effects of Easter, today as in bible times, are *many*: Sorrow turned to joy, despair turned to hope, The End transformed into new creation, Death to Life Eternal. But most immediately for disciples of Jesus, then as now, the effect is a complete shift in the Lord's expectations of us.

*Before* the encounter with the risen Lord, his followers were *subjects* of Jesus' ministry. They were *acted upon* by grace. They had things *done* to them and *taught* to them and *shown* to them. They were witnesses to all of the good deeds that God was unleashing in the world through Jesus. They were the ones who were healed and forgiven and restored from the grave and saved from storms and trials and threats. They were the learners and the apprentices, the ponderers, the absorbers of the story, the hearers of the Good News. But at Easter, all that changed. Or, better to say it, all that *doubled* for his followers. Because now, in light of the resurrection, without ceasing to be subjects of God's compassion, the disciples—then and now—are required to be *agents* of all those things. Without ceasing to listen to the Word and to welcome the grace and to marvel at what the *Lord* has done, it is the added responsibility of Christians to *be* do-ers of it all.

No longer merely the taught, we must be teachers.

No longer merely the healed and consoled, we must become the healers and consolers.

No longer merely witnesses to the Lord's victory over sin and death, we must now be the *evidence* of that victory—the proclaimers and the live-ers of it all, for the sake of the many who cannot yet hear it or believe it. No longer merely prayers but the *answer* to the prayers of others. It is still the Lord who acts and who saves, but it is now *through* us, rather than merely *to* us.

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And that is a seismic transformation in how we imagine our duties as Christ's followers, so radical that even many pious church people still struggle to get it. Consider this very day's liturgical celebration for example. For the past 20 years or so we have been invited by Popes to name this Sunday in this Octave of Easter also as "Divine Mercy Sunday." That's fine, but there is a certain *way* to meditate of God's boundless mercy that is proper for *Easter* people and there's a different way that isn't so much so. For people of the *resurrection*, it cannot be enough anymore merely to implore the *Lord* to be more generous in mercy toward us as the recipients—as if God hasn't yet been giving enough or doesn't want to be. That would be like the disciples who were still locked in the upper room a full week after Easter, apparently waiting for Jesus to do or give something more than he already *had*. Sitting around in hopes of yet another personal visit, imagining perhaps that the resurrection wasn't a sufficient conclusion to the story. But for Easter people the proper disposition toward God's mercy is to be *dispensers* of it, *practitioners* of it, *models* of it, *do-ers* of it. Our Lord will never be more merciful to us than He has already been, so if there's any shortage of mercy in our world (and there certainly does seem to be), then the problem is not with God.

The problem may well be with us Easter people who struggle to make the shift from passive recipients to actors and demonstrators of justice, compassion, and mercy. As Pope Francis reminds us so consistently and often uncomfortably, we churchy people can easily become awfully self-involved and self-concerned fussing over the décor in that locked upper room while a whole hurting world waits outside for us to unbolt the door and come out with the gifts that grace has given us. We must pray always, but if that's *all* we do, never leaving the room of refuge, then we don't yet fully understand. What Jesus may well have asked those first Apostles he may well ask of us too, i.e., what are we waiting for? What is it that we think has yet to happen before we are ready and able to open the door and do the work? What grace of the Holy Spirit do we believe to be lacking in baptism, confirmation and Eucharist? Are we Easter people truly? Or not quite there yet? We can always begin, if that's what we truly desire. Locked doors do not define Easter. Open tombs do. "As the Father has sent me, even so do I send you. Now go."