

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Divine Mercy Sunday

April 28, 2019 C

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Risen Christ, we gather in your name to celebrate your victory over sin, evil and death. As you breathed your Spirit on those gathered in the Upper Room, breathe your Spirit on us so that we may recognize your presence in our midst and come to know you in the breaking open of your Word. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator: During the Easter Season, the first reading is from the Acts of the Apostles authored by Luke. Acts, among other things, relates for us the development of the early church. This week's reading tells how the working of signs and wonders led to great numbers joining the Church. During the C cycle of the Easter season, our *second reading* is from the Book of Revelation. Our *Gospel* this week recounts two post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus to his disciples.

As you will see in your Missalette, the *Second Sunday of Easter* is also called **Divine Mercy Sunday**, a reference to the *Divine Mercy devotion* made popular by St. Faustina Kowalska, which celebrates the wonderful mercy of God for the whole world.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Acts 5:12-16

The Apostles are preaching the message of Christ in a hostile environment. Note the observation: "*No one dared to join them.*" But soon people are attracted by the power of the Apostles' ability to heal the sick and cast out demons as a powerful sign that God's Spirit is acting in and through them.

One of the "proofs" of the Resurrection is the *transformation of fearful disciples into bold proclaimers* of Jesus and his message. This is one way Luke shows that Jesus is alive in his followers. Also, we note that just as Jesus worked many signs and wonders, his followers, filled with the Spirit of Jesus, are also working many signs and wonders, another "proof" of Jesus' Resurrection from the dead and of his presence in his new Church, the Body of Christ.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 118

This is a psalm of thanksgiving to God for his goodness which endures forever. Especially during this Easter Season, the Church gives thanks to God for the salvation earned by Jesus.

SECOND READING: Revelation 1:9-11, 12-13, 17-19

John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, is writing from the island of Patmos where he is in exile, having been banished for his belief in Jesus. He is writing to fellow Christians who are also suffering for their faith. His correspondence seeks to give comfort to his audience.

Sustained by a firm faith in God's power to save, and strengthened by the conviction that God will not abandon his followers to the forces of evil, John entrusts his present fears and future hopes to God and invites his readers to do likewise. The basic message of his book is: *Evil will not triumph over goodness, neither will the evil of Rome nor the evil of death caused by persecution.*

The "seven lampstands" is a reference not just to seven churches, but also to all Christian churches, seven being the number that symbolizes perfection or totality. Jesus, the "Son of Man," is in their midst. Because of his presence, there is "nothing to fear." Because of his Resurrection, Jesus "holds the keys over death." By standing with Jesus, Christians are assured of victory over all adversaries—even death.

**PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:
John 20:19-31**

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

**A participant reads the Gospel again,
then all pause to reflect.**

GOSPEL: John 20:19-31

This Gospel, especially the first part of it, is often called “John’s Pentecost” because in it, Jesus imparts his Holy Spirit to those present. In the first scene, Jesus comes to a group of *fear-filled, guilt-ridden and depressed* disciples. He stands in their midst and offers them *four* gifts: *peace, joy, the Holy Spirit, and the power to forgive sins*. Because they abandoned Jesus in his hour of need, the Apostles must likely have felt a great need for “*shalom*,” i.e., God’s peace and reconciliation. The *joy* at seeing Jesus replaces the depression caused by his absence. The *gift of the Holy Spirit* empowers the Apostles to go forth and preach the Good News, casting aside all fear. The *power to forgive sins* enables them to impart to others the saving power of Jesus. In time, these words will be looked upon as the Church’s basis for the sacrament of Reconciliation. Sins will be “retained” or not forgiven if people are not truly sorry for them or are unwilling to embrace Jesus’ teachings.

By sharing his wounds with the disciples (“*He showed them his hands and side.*”), Jesus is assuring them that it is really him and not some ghost. He is also teaching them that there is no Easter glory without Good Friday pain. Thirdly, Jesus may be saying to us: ‘Community is built when participants learn to share their wounds.’

Some scholars see Jesus’ appearance to Thomas as representing the second generation of Christians, those called to believe in the testimony of others.

Though we may judge Thomas harshly, Jesus takes him where he is at. From Thomas we learn how to be honest with our doubts. If Thomas needed to touch the wounds of Christ, Jesus would oblige him. The Gospel

does not say that Thomas actually touches the wounds, only that he cries out in faith: “*My Lord and my God!*” It is a story for all of us who may sometimes experience doubt concerning matters of faith. Jesus will be patient with us, too, and will help us overcome our doubts if we cooperate with his grace-filled touch upon our lives. To *believe* in Jesus’ Resurrection means more an intellectual assent. It also signifies that we too are *sent* to share the Good News with others.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what word/s or image/s in the readings caught your attention? Did they comfort or challenge you or touch you in some other way?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. In the second reading, we hear the following words: “*Do not be afraid...I hold the keys of death.*” How do these words of Jesus comfort you?

3. Some scholars note that Thomas missed out initially because he had withdrawn from the community. Do Christians today miss out when they are not part of a Christian community? If so, how?

4. Have you ever experienced doubt or have had a faith crisis in your Christian journey? If so, what was that like for you? What helped you to get through that difficult time?

5. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

JOURNALING: *Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestions: If you know someone having a faith struggle, reach out to him/her. Pray for those suffering religious persecution.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

FACILITATOR: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestions:

✠ *Jesus, thank you for your mercy. Help me to share your mercy with others.*

✠ *Jesus, thank you for the gift of peace. Help me to be a peacemaker.*

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

FACILITATOR: Let us now conclude with prayers of thanksgiving, petition and intercession. What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Almighty Lord God,
your glory cannot be approached,
your compassion knows no bounds,
your love for all mankind
is beyond human expression.
In your mercy look on us
and on all your people;
do not leave us to our sins,
but deal with us according to your goodness.
Guide us to the haven of your will,
and make us truly obedient
to your commandments,
so that we may not feel ashamed
when we come before your judgment seat.
For you, God, are good and ever-loving.
We glorify you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
now and forever, to the ages of ages.
Amen.*