

Sunday of Divine Mercy/Second Sunday of Easter – April 28, 2019 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Acts 5:12-16

Many signs and wonders were done among the people at the hands of the apostles. They were all together in Solomon's portico. None of the others dared to join them, but the people esteemed them. Yet more than ever, believers in the Lord, great numbers of men and women, were added to them. Thus they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them. A large number of people from the towns in the vicinity of Jerusalem also gathered, bringing the sick and those disturbed by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.

Psalm: Ps 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

R. (1) Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.

Let the house of Israel say,
"His mercy endures forever."

Let the house of Aaron say,
"His mercy endures forever."

Let those who fear the LORD say,
"His mercy endures forever."

I was hard pressed and was falling,
but the LORD helped me.

My strength and my courage is the LORD,
and he has been my savior.
The joyful shout of victory
in the tents of the just.

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.
By the LORD has this been done;
it is wonderful in our eyes.
This is the day the Lord has made;
let us be glad and rejoice in it.

Scripture Reading: Rev 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19

I, John, your brother, who share with you the distress, the kingdom, and the endurance we have in Jesus, found myself on the island called Patmos because I proclaimed God's word and gave testimony to Jesus. I was caught up in spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a voice as loud as a trumpet, which said, "Write on a scroll what you see." Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and when I turned, I saw seven gold lampstands and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, wearing an ankle-length robe, with a gold sash around his chest. When I caught sight of him, I fell down at his feet as though dead. He touched me with his right hand and said, "Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, the

one who lives. Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever. I hold the keys to death and the netherworld. Write down, therefore, what you have seen, and what is happening, and what will happen afterwards."

Gospel: John 20:19-31

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he 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." Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But 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."

Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the gospel be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Were you at the Easter Vigil? Incomparable, remember? A single, tiny light inched its way up the pitch-black aisle. It spread, all at once, absurdly, into more and more glowing dots, now evenly sparsed throughout the pews. A glowing, humble enchantment. The light of Christ. Now, one week later, in the Gospel, we find “doubting Thomas.” “Show me the nail marks in his hands, let me put my finger into his side and then I will believe.” Was he laying down conditions for faith? Let us look. Thomas and the other disciples were not yet exemplars of faith. Huddled in a tiny room with doors locked double tight for fear of the authorities, holding their distress close, with self-protection and doubt. Maybe that is why, in each of the New Testament accounts, Jesus appears first to women, not to men. In each case the women believed. Usually he then sent the women to the males, who in their case did not get it, at least not wholly. Peter and John actually did run to the empty tomb, and Peter went inside. “They did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead,” it says in John 20:9, except that John did, but they went home. Mary Magdalene was outside. In a heart-burst she knew her beloved. Christ told her not to hang on but to go to his brothers and explain the good news. She did. Let me tell you a story.

I once knew a man whose doubts were based in deep fear. For a long time, he nearly drowned in fear and doubt. He knew, in his mind anyway, that the Holy Spirit was never absent. But in his soul he was walking the edge of the void. Karl Rahner has said somewhere that *when you come to the void there is no proof either way. There can be no certainty* as to whether the void is absolute emptiness or whether it is the sheer openness of love. You have to make a choice. This man’s dear, impoverished self had known only empty echoes for such a long time, but suddenly he remembered Rahner’s dictum. Through grace and circumstance and through being loved, he saw that a choice was possible for him. Not a bravado choice, not even a very clear one, but still a choice. So he asked himself what, at that level, he did believe. Did he think that his own deep emptiness could produce all the foundations of the universe, the heart of the world, of everyone and everything he had ever known and loved? Or did he see that imperceptible love was nestling gently throughout every particle that exists? Was there a speck of dawning light, or was gloom the final word? He told me that his choice was surprisingly simple. It was taken in the absence of any proof, since proofs emerge from choice. His choosing was quiet, like still, small spring rain, in spite of his immersion in darkness. He chose light, which is love, which is “like gold to airy thinness beat. He made a leap of faith. In the present day, this man I knew repeats what doubting Thomas will finally say this Sunday. I hope you will be saying it too. “My Lord and my God.”

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Discuss the effectiveness of the apostles’ missionary efforts in the light of “Power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor 12:9-10, 13:14) Do you want Christ to use you on behalf of others? What are the implications?
2. Once, when John the Evangelist is “caught up in spirit,” Christ touches him and speaks to him. Are there others in history, “suffering for their faith,” who have received clear understanding and revelations? Can good things come from suffering?
3. Why do you think Jesus breathed on the disciples when he gave them the Holy Spirit? “The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life ...” (Genesis 2:7). What effect did this gift have on the disciples’ fear? How about your fear, in various aspects of your life? What do forgiveness of sin and resurrection have in common?

INVITATION TO ACT

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Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

God of everlasting mercy, who in the very recurrence of the paschal feast kindle the faith of the people you have made your own, increase, we pray, the grace you have bestowed, that all may grasp and rightly understand in what font they have been washed, by whose Spirit they have been reborn, by whose Blood they have been redeemed. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

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Prayer to St. Michael

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits, who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.