

The Roman Missal – that big red book I use at the altar – which gives us not only the prayers— but also specific instructions for celebrating the Mass – calls Easter: “the greatest and most noble of all the solemnities of the Church.” --Solemnities being the big feasts of the Church year.

Easter is so great and so noble – that it cannot be celebrated all at once and then forgotten about. Easter is celebrated in a special way for a week of Sundays --- 7 consecutive Sundays ending with the feast of Pentecost – this year on June the 4th. And in fact, Easter is celebrated every time we gather for Mass.

And much like a three ring circus gives its audience constant action and motion --- our three readings each Sunday of the Easter season give us constant action and emotion as we continue to unpack the Easter message of Christ’s resurrection.

Our first reading during the Easter season will always taken from the Acts of the Apostles – which tells us how the early Church lived out their commitment to the Risen Christ.

Today’s reading focusses on the unity of those earliest followers of Christ – how they took care of each other’s physical needs – by pooling their resources so no one would be in need ---- and how they took care of each other’s spiritual needs – by gathering together in prayer and celebrating the Eucharist – every day.

Our second reading throughout the Easter season will always be taken from the first letter of Peter. These readings from St. Peter are baptismal homilies given to encourage the newly baptized who are the new members of the Christian family – but they are also words to encourage those who have been in the Church for a while – who have experienced suffering--- and have remained faithful.

In today’s reading, Peter tells us two times we should REJOICE at the gift of our salvation given to us through the resurrection of Jesus.

This gift is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading – and that’s why we should be filled with an indescribable and glorious joy.

Our gospel readings through this week of Sundays of the Easter season -- are mostly taken from St. John’s Gospel and lead us to continue unpacking what following Jesus, now resurrected from the dead – should mean for us.

So that’s the lesson plan for the Easter season. Throw in the celebration of Confirmation and 1st Communion, and Mother’s Day and Memorial Day – and the time will fly because we are having so much fun!

Now as for this Sunday, for many years on the liturgical calendar of the Church – this second Sunday of Easter was known as WHITE SUNDAY – not just because the color of vestments is white – but more so that the newly Baptized from the Easter Vigil were still wearing their white Baptismal garments – it was easier to pick out the newcomers then – the new members of the family. This changed in the new millennium – when in the year 2000 – Saint John Paul II declared this second Sunday of Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday.

In establishing the feast, Pope John Paul posed the question – what better time to remember God’s divine mercy – then in the days following the out-pouring of that mercy upon the cross? It is through the death and resurrection of Jesus that we are set free from our sins and the fear of death – not things we deserve, earn, merit, or can do for ourselves – they are pure gift – the definitive sign of God’s mercy to us – yes, while we were still sinners – Christ died for us! Even though we celebrated a full year of recalling God’s mercy last year – I think that whole concept of mercy can remain a bit abstract for us ---- until we finally do experience it in some way ---

much like we probably all thought we understood what a tornado was --- but all have a much better understanding of that after March 6th.

I think that was Thomas' experience in the Gospel today. He probably thought he understood God's mercy – at least he did in his head. But after he had experienced Jesus – and experienced Jesus' mercy and understanding – Jesus did not criticize him for his unbelief, he didn't question why he did not believe the other disciples – he simply said -- “put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put into my side – and do not be unbelieving, but believe.” – Thomas then had a new and fuller understanding of what mercy was all about.

Once we have had an experience of Jesus' mercy like Thomas had – life will never be the same for us – we will understand Jesus' words of being merciful –just like our heavenly father is merciful. . .

So how do we experience God's mercy?

One way is the experience many of us had on Good Friday – we heard the slam of the hammer – and imagined ourselves staring up at Jesus, hanging on that cross – and knowing that he endured that pain and suffering for us – for me and for you – because he loved us.

We can experience the mercy of God through the same words Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, “go and sin no more” --- through our celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation.

We can experience the mercy of God by finally deciding to turn loose of a past hurt, the burden of a grudge that we have been carrying around – much too long. The pain and resentment that can drain our spirit.

We can experience God's mercy by turning loose of the lowly opinion we may have of ourselves – or of someone else --- realizing that God has created us in his image and likeness, that God knew us even before we were born –

has called us to be disciples of his son – and has equipped us with gifts and talents to help bring forth the kingdom. What an incredible ministry God entrusts us with!

Once we move from mercy being an abstract concept – and truly understanding it --- because we have experienced it – then we will become merciful – just as our heavenly Father is merciful.

And so we joyfully pray: Lord Jesus, have mercy upon us – and upon the whole world!