

Happy Divine Mercy Sunday!

I remember being about 7 years old – all I wanted for Christmas was a bike. Even though I wanted a bike I tried not to get my hopes up; I refused to believe. I was afraid that on Christmas morning I would find underwear and Legos under the tree but no bike. I could not handle that kind of disappointment.

Thomas had a generally pessimistic outlook on life. Don't get me wrong: he was brave and willing to die for Jesus but always saw the glass as half empty. When Jesus set out for Judea where the Jews were trying to stone him, Thomas said to the other disciples, "Let us also go to die with him."^{1,2} At the last supper, when Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for the disciples in His Father's house, and that He would come back for them, Thomas' response was, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?"³

We can't be too harsh on Thomas for not believing in the risen Christ. All the disciples mistrusted after they saw Jesus led away to be crucified. When He was buried, their hopes were buried with Him; and when the news that He was risen was brought to them, they all disbelieved.⁴ We read in Luke that when Jesus appeared to the disciples, "they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost."⁵

When Thomas hears that the disciples have seen the risen Lord and have been given the ability to forgive sins, it is too good to be believed. A risen Jesus full of mercy was too great a thing for which to hope. If Thomas believed and was wrong – how could he handle that kind of disappointment?

How important is the forgiveness of sins in God's plan? The Sacrament of Penance was the very first thing our Lord established after his resurrection! In today's Gospel Jesus said, "... As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And then, "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.'"⁶ Our Lord

died on the cross to reunite us with the Father and give us eternal life. But Jesus knew that we would sin and put in jeopardy our relationship with God and our eternal salvation – the very gift of His cross. So, the first thing he does after his resurrection is institute a way for us to reunite with his saving power!

After a few bad episodes in the confessional during my teens, I did not go to Confession for more than twenty years. I used the excuse that I did not need a priest to get between me and God. I was wrong. Confessing to a priest is uncomfortable but makes perfect sense. The theologian Frank Sheed explains that it's "God's plan [to use] ... men to convey His gifts to men... After all, we learn about God from other men." Those who feel so certain that they must go to God alone for forgiveness would never know Christ lived, much less died for them, unless men had told them. Furthermore, "New birth in baptism is given by God through man; [and] so is Holy Communion."⁷ So why do people make an exception for Confession? Well, it's uncomfortable having to tell another person your sins. But this too makes sense. In sinning, we choose what pleases us against what God wants for us. In confessing, our will chooses what displeases it, because God wills that it should.⁸ At some point I knew that I had to go back to Confession. My wife suggested I find a priest that speaks very little English. I made an appointment with my pastor and went. It was a truly terrifying, humbling, wonderful, and freeing experience.

We have a God who gave us a very human way to make things right - a way that lets us feel and know that we are forgiven, and our status as adopted children is restored. A gift that is so amazing that Thomas was afraid to get his hopes up. Do we live a life dependent on God's mercy, and do we spread His mercy and love to all around us? Thomas, once convinced that Christ's gifts of redemption and mercy were real, did. He evangelized Greece and India and was martyred in the year seventy-two.

How many of you, if you died today, would like to bypass the fires of hell, skip past purgatory and be welcomed straight into heaven? This is what the Feast of Divine Mercy is about!

In the 1930s, Jesus chose a humble Polish nun, St. Maria Faustina, to receive revelations concerning His Divine Mercy.⁹ Jesus told Her, "...I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day... I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the Fount of My mercy. The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment. ... Let no soul fear to draw near to Me. ... It is My desire that it be solemnly celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter."¹⁰

To receive this great gift, you need to do three things: go to Confession, Holy Communion, and pray for the intentions of the Pope. But what if you are stuck at home through no fault of your own? Never fear. In the Vatican decree establishing this plenary indulgence, there is a special provision to obtain the indulgence without attending Mass. It reads, "if totally detesting any sin... , and with the intention of fulfilling as soon as possible the three usual conditions, [if we] will recite the Our Father and the Creed before a devout image of Our Merciful Lord Jesus and, in addition, pray a devout invocation to the Merciful Lord Jesus ..." So that's it. To receive these amazing graces, recite the Our Father, the Creed, and pray "Merciful Jesus, I trust in you" in front of an image of our Merciful Lord. Then, go to Confession, Holy Communion, and pray for the intentions of Pope Francis as soon as you are able.¹¹

Today we celebrate Jesus' desire to shower us with "a whole ocean of graces." Graces that assure the complete forgiveness of sins and punishment, graces which make our souls as pure as the souls of the newly baptized!¹²

This is so good it is almost too good to believe. But then again, little boys have been known to get bikes at Christmas.

¹ John 11:16

² Newman, J. H. (1868). *Parochial and plain sermons* (Vol. 2, p. 13). London; Oxford; Cambridge: Rivingtons.

³ [New American Bible](#). (2011). (Revised Edition, Jn 14:5). Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

⁴ Newman, J. H. (1868). *Parochial and plain sermons* (Vol. 2, p. 13). London; Oxford; Cambridge: Rivingtons.

⁵ Luke 24:37

⁶ John 19:21-23

⁷ Sheed, Frank J, "Theology for Beginners", Anglican Press, 1957, Page 139

⁸ Sheed, Frank J, "Theology for Beginners", Anglican Press, 1957, Page 140

⁹ <http://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/prayers/divine-mercy-sunday.cfm#Origin>

¹⁰ <http://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/prayers/divine-mercy-sunday.cfm#Origin>

¹¹ <http://www.divinemercysunday.com/pdf/Divine-Mercy-Sunday-amid-a-Global-Crisis.pdf>

¹² <http://www.thedivinemercy.org/news/On-Going-to-Confession-Before-Mercy-Sunday-2618>