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In some parts of the Church, today is known as Divine Mercy Sunday. This emphasis on the Divine Mercy of Jesus was revealed by Our Lord to St. Faustina Kowalska, a 20<sup>th</sup> century Polish Nun. Our Lord reportedly said to St. Faustina, *Yes, the first Sunday after Easter is the Feast of Mercy, but there must be acts of mercy. I demand from you deeds of mercy which are to arise out of love for Me. You are to show mercy to your neighbors always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to excuse or absolve yourself from it.* Neither our prayer books, nor the Missal specifically call this day Divine Mercy Sunday, but our Epistle and Gospel for today certainly lend themselves to it. After all, today is the final day of the Octave of Easter, the chief festival of the Christian year, which is the culmination of Jesus' greatest work of mercy for all mankind, His death and resurrection from the dead.

The events of Maundy Thursday, the institution of the Mass and of Holy Communion, His sweating great drops of blood in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, the scourging, the crowning with thorns, the mocking, carrying His cross, the nails through His hands and feet, His death on the cross, the spear in His side, and the bursting of His heart, from which flowed blood and water, these are the greatest acts of Divine Mercy that Jesus has freely given to each one of us. And yet we find in the Gospel that Jesus goes even further in Mercy. After the

Resurrection of Jesus that first Easter morning, and the discovery of the empty tomb, the disciples hid themselves. They were gripped with fear because over what the Pharisees, the Sanhedrin, and the Romans could do to them once word got to them that the tomb was empty. And while they are in hiding, the Resurrected Lord appears among them, and instead of upbraiding them for their lack of faith, he says, *Peace be unto you*. Then He shows them His hands and his side. He shows them the trophies of His Divine Mercy, and the Gospel says, *then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord*. It is notable that in this morning's Gospel the showing of the scars in Jesus' hands and side precede breathing on the Disciples, so that they may receive the Holy Ghost, and then commanding them, *Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them: and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained*. Jesus passes on His ministry of Divine Mercy and reconciliation to His Disciples.

This morning's Gospel omits that one of the disciples was not present when Jesus first appeared to them. Thomas seems to have been off by himself, separating himself even from the assembly of his fellow disciples. But he had not just separated himself from the other disciples, he had separated himself even further through his lack of faith. When the disciples said to him, we have seen the Lord, he replied, *except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into*

*the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.* The desire to see the nail prints is understandable, but to thrust his hand into his side is rather dramatic. It is clear that Thomas was shaken by the events of Good Friday that he cannot see beyond it. He grieves the torturous crucifixion and death of Jesus, and he is afraid. Now the Lord could have let Thomas go. He had lost one disciple already, Judas, what was one more? Besides Thomas, would not be the only one to lose faith in Jesus. Thomas would not be the last to struggle to believe Jesus had died and risen from the grave.

And yet when Jesus appears again to the disciples and this time with Thomas present, He does not scold them for still hiding. He does not rebuke Thomas for his lack of faith. Instead He says again, Peace be unto you. And then to Thomas he says, *reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless but believing.* The risen Lord is still the Good Shepherd, and we see He goes after His lost sheep, Thomas. And Thomas's response to our Lord's mercy was the first confession of faith in the risen Lord, *My Lord and my God.* Our Lord said to St. Faustina, *the very depths of my mercy are open....I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fount of My mercy. Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet. My mercy is so great that no mind, will be able to fathom it throughout all eternity.*

*Everything that exists has come forth from the very depths of My most tender mercy. Mankind will not have peace until it turns to the Fount of My Mercy.*

We are reminded of the words of the prophet Micah, who writes, *With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old...? He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.* What does it mean to walk humbly with God, and to love mercy? Let us remember that God's mercy is not a free pass to any kind of life or philosophy. It would not have been within the limits of Divine Mercy to leave Thomas in his doubt. For God's mercy is a mercy that seeks us out and confronts us, it confronts that which is lacking in our faith and causing us to struggle. This is why St. Thomas is confronted with the wounds of Christ, why He is invited to thrust his hand dramatically into the Lord's side, because when faced with the mercy of God we are called to repentance. In those situations when we are confronted with God's Divine Mercy, I pray that we too will say with St. Thomas, *My Lord and my God.*

We who have been made partakers of God's Divine Mercy through Jesus Christ are called to be witnesses of Him to the world. We are called to be

messengers of His mercy. What does this mean? Remember the words of our Lord to St. Faustina, *I demand from you deeds of mercy which are to arise out of love for Me. You are to show mercy to your neighbors always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to excuse or absolve yourself from it.* There is nothing new in this revelation of Jesus to St. Faustina, these words could have been taken straight from the Gospels. For the Disciples this is seen most obviously through the ministry of the keys which Jesus entrusted to them, *Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them: and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.* But to the layman this means that we must be imitators of Christ, constant in prayer, quick to forgive, slow to anger and wrath, always charitable, full of mercy and of all the works of Christ, holding all accountable to the Gospel. *For this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son...And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*