

In the Jubilee Year 2000, St John Paul II established the first Sunday after Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday in response to the revelations received by St. Faustina. Over 70 years before this, St Faustina wrote in her diary that Jesus desired for His Divine Mercy to be enthroned on that day. In order to fulfill this promise, she commissioned an artist to paint the image of Divine Mercy that had been revealed to her by Jesus. In this image, Jesus is shown stepping out of the darkness with one hand raised in blessing while the other touches His pierced Heart from which flows forth rays of blood and water. Underneath the feet of Jesus are written the words, “Jesus, I trust in you.”

Truthfully, I didn’t always understand the connection between the Divine Mercy of Jesus and this particular Sunday. After reflecting on the Gospel for this week, however, I realized that there is indeed a deep connection between the two. In our Gospel, we encounter the disciples huddled in the darkness behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. Jesus passed through the locked doors and said, “Peace be with you.” He then showed them His pierced hands and side and they rejoiced at His presence among them. Later, He breathed on them saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”

There are interesting similarities between this account in Scripture and the image of Divine Mercy. In the image, Jesus is shown standing before a darkened background, as if He had just stepped into a dark room. One of His hands is raised in a benediction granting peace while the other hand pours forth His mercifully spirit upon those who gaze upon Him. This reminds me of today’s Gospel in which Jesus says “Peace be with you” before pouring His Spirit upon them so that they can forgive sins, a tangible experience of the mercy of God.

Of course, as we know, the Gospel account does not end there. Thomas was missing when Jesus appeared, so when the other disciples try to tell him what happened, he says, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into them and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” Thomas did not trust what he heard, and was unable to believe that Jesus was alive. So once again, Jesus walks through the locked doors to appear to Thomas saying “Peace be with you.” Jesus then invites Thomas to place his fingers into the nail marks on Jesus’ hands and into the wound on Jesus’ side so that he will believe. Thomas is overcome by Jesus’ merciful gaze and cries out “My Lord and My God.”

This scene reveals a simple yet startling truth. Despite the fact that Jesus has all the power in the world and can walk through locked doors, He cannot enter a locked heart. Jesus must be welcomed into men’s hearts through faith and trust. The phrase “Jesus, I trust in you” is not put at the bottom of the image of Divine Mercy out of mere piety. Instead, it is there because it must be... because the Divine Mercy of Jesus cannot be received if we do not open our hearts to Him by crying out “Jesus, I trust in you.”

How many times in our own lives have we been like those disciples who are locked in the darkness in that upper room out of fear? How many times do we find ourselves hiding from the struggles and heartaches of life out of fear, doubting our God’s love and mercy? How many times in our lives have we been like Thomas? How many times have we refused to believe those around us when they tell us that we are loved by God, that our God suffered and died and rose for us? How many times have we told our God that He must prove Himself to us by some tangible sign or we will not believe in His love?

Despite our doubts and fears... despite our locked hearts... our God continues to be present in our lives. Even though we try to lock ourselves away from Him and the world, He continues to walk through these walls so that we might know His light and peace. He knocks on the doors of our hearts, begging us to trust Him so that we can receive His mercy. While we may never see Him physically before us like Thomas or St Faustina, this does not mean that He is not there. As Jesus told Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

While we don't always realize it, Jesus does reveal Himself to us in tangible ways just as He did to the early disciples. As we heard in our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the early Church "devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers." They encountered Christ daily in the Scriptures and in their love for one another, in the Eucharist and in prayer. Today, we can still encounter Jesus in these same ways; by loving God and one another, by studying Scripture, by receiving the Eucharist, and by seeking God in prayer. As we heard in our second reading, "Although you have not seen him, you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

God wanted His Divine Mercy to be celebrated on the First Sunday after Easter because He wanted us to know that He suffered and died and rose for each of us individually so that we no longer have to hide scared in the darkness behind the locked doors of our hearts. He is here, present before us offering us His mercy, and the only person who can keep us from receiving this mercy is ourselves. He is here, staring at us with His merciful gaze, begging us to unlock the doors of our hearts and let Him in... begging us to cry out, "Jesus, I trust in you."