

## St Pius & St Anthony Homily Divine Mercy Sunday Year C (2025) Luke

I try not to tell stories that reveal my age or since things change so much over time, I try not to tell stories that leave anyone out. So what I'm about to tell may have happened to you or not. If it hasn't happened, it may mean that your under 25-30 years old (OR maybe it only happened to me, and I'm just projecting, my mistake onto everyone else?) But I think way back when, THIS used to be something that happened a lot. What made me think, of what I'm about to share, was that recently I entered a public bathroom, and opening the door, a light automatically came on (*I assume it automatically went off when I left-but how do I know-I wasn't there any longer?*) This is striking because when I was young, we heard a thousand times a week, "Why is every light on in the house, turn them off when you leave the room!" But this other thing that happened, so often, either to me, or by me (accidentally, of course) was that after washing hands, I go to the door and turn off the lights, only to hear someone shout from behind a stall door, "I'm still in here! Wait!" then I say back, "Oh, sorry" turning light back on and getting out fast! As I say, between the energy saving-automatic lights today or the fact that so many businesses don't have switches that are even publicly accessible by the door wall, such accidental (*OR not so accidental*) turnings off, may never happen anymore. But it used to, and I share it because it is an experience of being 'left in the dark'! This experience is as unsettling as the similar experience of being 'locked in' accidentally after hours. Like happened to a high-school co-worker of mine at the drugstore we worked at-didn't realize it until we walked to our cars in the lot and saw his-"Where'd Nick go?" or what happened to my younger brother once, when he was locked into the food storage pantry in our Catholic school kitchen on a Mission Day (like a Carnival Day) back in the 1970's. (Mom was a leading volunteer at school, and she had brought him with her-he was not kindergarten age yet.) We only found him when the principal coordinated a whole school building search of him going room to room during the cleanup after the day's fun/games, and there he was locked into the storage closet off the kitchen.

I tell those stories of being **locked in**, or **left in the dark**, because that is where we find the apostles today in the gospel! What are they doing in that condition? How'd they get there? Jesus has to break in, to draw them out, and set them free again. Jesus repeats his original mission instructions to them "**As Father sent me, so I send you.**" (Jn 20:21) But the apostles are doing this to themselves! Locking themselves up- The Roman & Jewish leaders don't have to do it-the apostles, out of fear, do it to themselves. Was that Jewish-Roman leaders' goal by killing Jesus, to shut down the whole Christian mission? Initially, that works.

But, then Jesus is back! And the apostles should be too, but they aren't! What is Jesus going to do about the apostles' failure to carry on? Here is where

our Jesus shines and proves His good Shepherding. He is not upset! He knows us! What is the first thing He says, after finding His apostles in a state/place they were never in when He was with them- and after abandoning Him at His arrest & trial? No reprimand, no retribution, no shaming reminder even of their sin. No, His first word (& said 3 times!) is "Peace" He forgives them, sets them free again. Why the three times mentioning 'Peace'? Maybe this was Jesus' public forgiveness and redemption of them all for their three sins of denying him by fearfully hiding away, locked up for the three days since Good Friday, similar to how Jesus will specifically forgive Peter three times, giving Peter a similar public redemption moment when Peter will respond 3 times (to un-do his three failure denials) affirming anew Peter's own 'Love of Jesus' and His charge to 'feed-care for' sheep (John 21:15-19.) What a patient Shepherd we have in Jesus! The apostles had gone off and **buried themselves** away fearfully into a hole (like the Romans/Jews did to Jesus). In both visits by Jesus (w/out Thomas and then w/ him) we are told that the doors were locked"-FEAR (Jn 20:19 & 26). This is the last place Jesus wants His apostles to be. He wanted them to share in His Mission, all of it. He wants them to rise-up confidently with Him, out of this self-imposed bondage of theirs. As our ever-faithful patient-'Divinely Merciful' Shepherd, Jesus seeks them out, forgiving and strengthening them again, setting them free to stand/join with Him, announcing the Good News of redemption to everyone. How does He do this, but by first 1) appearing resurrected (this can be yours too!), 2) Jesus breathes on then giving them His Spirit (this is like Jesus whispering-'You can do this-you can do this!) and 3) Jesus Co-missions them again, "As Father sent me-so I send you"(19:21) He's saying, "What Father did for me, I will do for you-You can Rise!"

The effect of this Thomas episode, Jesus' appearance story, is that Jesus sets the apostles free again. He does. They are locked up, in the dark again. They've backslid badly. And I'd say, not just physically-which is one problem-hiding in dark locked away fearfully- but as a group they are stuck, bound up spiritually too. Thomas' absence and doubts are serious breaches of mission protocol. I am not sure which is worse here. Thomas not being there (*Jesus' mission command about sending out always in pairs (2x2)--we heard that twice in Holy Week when Jesus sent apostles in a pair first to fetch the new donkey in Luke 19:29 and then later to prepare the Passover meal room (Peter & John) finding the water jar-man in town-Luke 22:8-10) so Thomas being left out alone*, OR Thomas not being able to be persuaded by the others' encounter with Jesus Risen? What is going on with the credibility of the other ten, their lack of convincing speech/witness that they can not bring Thomas to believe/accept their story of Jesus' appearance? The whole group is in a bind-stuck-locked up (and its their own doing-their self-sabotage-as Rock Singer Pink says they are 'Their own worst enemy- don't let me get me.' (*Or since we just celebrated Earth Day April 22, do you remember the first Earth Day poster back in*

*1970, of Walt Kelly's Pogo Cartoon Character who sees a polluted lake and says "I have met the enemy, and the enemy is us!"-We did this!)*

So Jesus appearing, and yes patiently showing back up a 2<sup>nd</sup> time, He 'sets them free', empowering them, breathing His emboldening, life-giving Spirit into them, and sharing 'peace' with them-along with the authority to 'forgive sin'. Please don't misunderstand the difficult mention of 'retaining' or 'holding' sin as justification to not offer forgiveness to another (remember Jesus' command to 'forgive 7x70' Matt 18:22, & 'Love enemies-do good to them' Matt 5:22) because Jesus is acknowledging how freedom works--if they 'withhold' forgiveness or retain sin (as against Thomas) they are 'locking themselves'-binding themselves as seen in their own self-imposed bondage in fear (Matt 7:2 "For as you judge, so will you be judged") Denying forgiveness, also denies it to oneself! Jesus is saying, "Stop holding yourselves back. Not forgiving locks you into the past. Mercy sets us free. Jesus forgives, so that we forgive one another! He gives us mercy, so we can be merciful to others. He sets us free from sin to help others find freedom from sin! That is Divine Mercy.

*In 20:19 'As Father sent me, so I send you'*

*Luke 6:36 "Be Merciful, just as your Heavenly Father is merciful.'*