

Second Sunday of Easter – Sunday of Divine Mercy  
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Holy Family Catholic Church  
Kirkland, Washington  
28 April 2019

Acts 5:12-16  
Psalm 118  
Revelation 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19  
(John 20:29) John 20:19-31

*Divine Mercy: Be a Living Experience of Mercy*

Today is the Second Sunday of Easter, the eighth and final day of our celebration of the Easter Octave—and our joyful celebration of the Easter Season continues for fifty days, until Pentecost Sunday, on June 9<sup>th</sup>. It was on this Sunday in 2000 that Pope John Paul II canonized Sister Maria Faustina Kowalska as a saint—the Messenger and Apostle of Divine Mercy. And on that day he declared that “from now on throughout the Church [this day] *will be called ‘Divine Mercy Sunday’*,” in fulfillment of the request that Jesus had made to Saint Faustina.<sup>1</sup>

Saint Faustina was a young nun in Poland when, in 1931, she received a vision of Jesus and His Divine Mercy—which we can see in the well-known image of Jesus blessing us as rays of red and white light stream out from His Sacred Heart. For the next seven years, until her death in 1938, Saint Faustina received regular revelations from Jesus, which are recorded in her *Diary*.

The reason that Jesus appeared to Saint Faustina was because He wanted the world to become more aware of His Divine Mercy that is always streaming out of His Sacred Heart; that is always available and being offered to each one of us—to each and every person. This message of Divine Mercy is a message for all of us. Whether we’ve experienced plenty of Jesus’ Divine Mercy; some of Jesus’ Divine Mercy; or maybe we’re not sure if we have—on this particular Sunday, Jesus is calling each of us to go deeper in our experience and awareness of His Divine Mercy.<sup>2</sup>

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In his homily nineteen years ago, Pope John Paul II spoke of two important aspects of Jesus' Divine Mercy. One: the importance of having a *living experience* of God's Divine Mercy.<sup>3</sup> Two: the importance of *practicing* mercy toward others.<sup>4</sup> These two go together and are consistent with the principle: "No one gives what he doesn't have."<sup>5</sup> If I don't have a *living experience* of Divine Mercy, then I'm not able to *practice* mercy toward others. The more I have a *living experience* of Divine Mercy, the more I am able to *practice* mercy toward others.

We see the importance of *living experience* woven through the readings today, particularly with the example of Thomas—"Doubting Thomas", as he's often called. Whatever blockages were in the way of Thomas' belief, they all fell away when he had a *living experience* of the Risen Christ—when he touched Jesus' wounds.<sup>6</sup> From that moment on, the wounds that Jesus received at His Crucifixion were transformed from a sign of our sin to a sign of His Divine Mercy.<sup>7</sup> Like Thomas, we must have a personal *living experience* of Divine Mercy for it to have an effect on our life. Like Thomas, we must touch Divine Mercy for ourselves.<sup>8</sup>

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Father Gregory Boyle is a Jesuit priest who, in 1984, founded a ministry called Homeboy Industries, which "provides hope, training, and support" to men and women coming out of involvement with gangs.<sup>9</sup> He is the author of two best-selling books, *Tattoos on the Heart* and *Barking to the Choir*. Father Greg will be in Seattle for two talks in May, so I'm currently reading *Barking to the Choir* in preparation for his visit.

In this book, Father Greg "shares what three decades of working with gang members . . . has taught him about faith, compassion, and . . . kinship."<sup>10</sup> His stories offer snapshots "into the challenges and joys of life on the margins. . . . These former gang members uplift the soul and reveal how bright life can be when filled with unconditional love and kindness."<sup>11</sup> The words

used to describe this book—faith, compassion, kindness, love—these are all words used by the Catechism to define mercy: “The loving kindness, compassion, or forbearance shown to one who offends (e.g., the mercy of God to us sinners).”<sup>12</sup>

Father Greg’s stories are full of examples of Mercy, and one in particular I’d like to share with you all today:<sup>13</sup>

Father Greg was in his office having a meeting with a young woman named Lety. Suddenly she said, “I wish you were God.” He laughed, thinking she was kidding. When he saw the tears welling up in her eyes, he paused and asked her, “Why do you wish I was God?”

She took a few moments to compose herself, then said, “Cuz . . . I think you’d let me into heaven.” Then they both started to cry.

Reflecting on this encounter, Father Greg wrote: “We believe that God is inclined to decline our credit card, that our account with God has insufficient funds. We don’t understand God’s generosity—it flies in the face of our human [understanding]. But God is not who we think God is.”

In this encounter between Father Greg and Lety we see both the importance of the *living experience* of mercy and the importance of *practicing* mercy—they always go together. We can only assume that Lety had had very few experiences of mercy in her life up to that point. Therefore, she didn’t believe that God was merciful—she didn’t believe that God was Someone who would let her into Heaven. But, because Father Greg *practiced* mercy toward her—because he became a *living experience* of mercy for her—she could start to believe.<sup>14</sup> Just like Thomas touching the wounds of Christ, Lety could start to believe in Mercy because she now had *living*

*experiences* of mercy to draw upon. To teach her that maybe God is not who she thought He was.

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My brothers and sisters, Jesus gave us the gift of Divine Mercy Sunday to help us become more aware of the depth of His Mercy. We become more aware of His Mercy in two ways:

- By having a *living experience* of Divine Mercy
- By *practicing* mercy toward others

The two always go together.

There are many ways we can have a *living experience* of Divine Mercy here at Holy Family Church:

- First and foremost, through Confession. We offer Confession Monday through Saturday. There's no better place to have a *living experience* of God's Mercy.
- This afternoon at 2:30, we have our Divine Mercy celebration.
- On Friday evening, May 10<sup>th</sup>, we have our next Mercy Night. Come to experience healing prayer, Confession, and to hear testimony of God's Mercy.

Hearing other people's testimonies of God's Mercy is inspiring, and it is so important in deepening our own experience of God's Mercy. I encourage to learn about other people's stories of God's Mercy:

- Read one of Father Greg's books.
- Come to a luncheon on Thursday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, in Bellevue for a ministry called Escape to Peace that many of our parishioners are involved in.<sup>15</sup> This is a ministry that helps women escape human trafficking. Please consider coming to

the luncheon where you can support the ministry, and also hear testimonies of God's Mercy. There's more information in our Bulletin.

And then there's *practicing* mercy toward others. Every day we have countless opportunities for this, don't we?

- As soon as we get on the road, we have opportunities. If someone cuts us off in traffic, we can get angry and frustrated with that person, or we can be a *living experience* of mercy for them. Smile and say prayer for them. Maybe they're having a bad day or are on their way to an emergency.
- And then the people that we are closest to: spouse, brother or sister, coworkers. Sometimes they can do annoying things, right? We can get angry or frustrated and try to get them back. Or we can be a *living experience* of mercy for them. Offer them a smile and say a prayer for them.

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My friends, today is all about opening ourselves up more and more to the depths of Divine Mercy. To do all we can to have *living experiences* of God's Mercy. The more we experience Divine Mercy for ourselves, the more we can practice mercy toward others—the more we can be a *living experience* of mercy for others.

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, *Homily of the Holy Father from Mass in St. Peter's Square for the Canonization of Sr Maria Faustina Kowalska*, 30 April 2000, par. 4.

Saint Faustina Kowalska, *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul* 742. See also: 300, 341, 420, 699, 1109.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, *Homily*, par. 8: "And you, Faustina, a gift of God to our time, a gift from the land of Poland to the whole Church, obtain for us an awareness of the depth of divine mercy..."

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, *Homily* par. 8: "...help us to have a living experience of [divine mercy] and to bear witness to it among our brothers and sisters."

<sup>4</sup> Christ has taught us that "man not only receives and experiences the mercy of God, but is also called 'to practice mercy' towards others: 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy' (Mt 5: 7)" (*Dives in misericordia*, par. 14).

<sup>5</sup> *Nemo dat quod non habet*

<sup>6</sup> John 20:24-29

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<sup>7</sup> Francis, *Homily for Second Sunday of Easter (or Divine Mercy Sunday)*, Saint Peter's Basilica, Vatican, 12 April 2015: "To us also, on this Sunday which Saint John Paul II wished to dedicate to Divine Mercy, the Lord shows us, through the Gospel, his wounds. They are *wounds of mercy*. It is true: the wounds of Jesus are wounds of mercy. 'With his stripes we are healed' (Isaiah 53:5)."

<sup>8</sup> Francis, *Homily*: "On the eighth day Jesus came once again into the Upper Room and showed his wounds to Thomas, so that he could touch them as he had wished to, in order to believe and thus become himself a witness to the Resurrection."

And: "Jesus invites us to behold these wounds, to touch them as Thomas did, to heal our lack of belief. Above all, he invites us to enter into the mystery of these wounds, which is the mystery of his merciful love."

<sup>9</sup> Homeboy Industries, *Our Mission*, <https://homeboyindustries.org/our-story/our-mission/>

<sup>10</sup> *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship*, front flap of book cover

<sup>11</sup> *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship*, front flap of book cover

<sup>12</sup> *Glossary from the Catechism of the Catholic Church*

<sup>13</sup> Adapted from: Gregory Boyle, *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship*, 28-29.

<sup>14</sup> John 20:27-28

<sup>15</sup> Escape to Peace, <http://escapetopeace.org/>