Homily –– 2 Sunday of Easter - cycle 2 - year a

divine mercy Sunday

Acts 2: 42-47

Psalm 118 **R/**. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast

 love endures forever.

*1 Peter 1: 3-9*

John 20: 19-31

1: Introduction

 *“This is the happiest day of my life!”*

These are the words of St. John Paul II. They were uttered on the day he canonized Sister Faustina (making her St. Faustina), and then he surprised the entire world by establishing Divine Mercy Sunday, (The feast day with the messages entrusted to Sister Faustina by Jesus) as a feast day for the entire church. He did it in Rome – not Poland – to underscore that divine mercy is for the whole world. He did so on the Second Sunday of Easter, April 20th, in the year 2000; almost 20 years to the day, is the Second Sunday of Easter, April 19th, 2020.

2: Pope John Paul II

 From his homily that day, he said, *“Right from the beginning of my ministry at St. Peters in Rome, I considered this message of Divine Mercy my special task. Providence has assigned it to me in the present situation of man, the church, and the world…..it is my task before God.”* In the year 2002, the Pope entrusted the whole world to Divine Mercy, when he consecrated the International Shrine of the Divine Mercy in Poland. Repeatedly, Pope John Paul II has written and spoken about the need for us to turn to the mercy of God as the answer to the specific problems of our times… (Have we listened… re: the coronavirus pandemic). He has placed a strong and significant focus on the Divine Mercy Message and devotion throughout his pontificate. That was to carry the church long after his death, which brings us to the question, what is Divine Mercy?

3: Divine Mercy

 Pope Francis said, *“The meaning of the word ‘Misericordis’, means opening one’s heart to wretchedness.”*

Wretchedness is best described by St. John Paul II, when in his homily, that blessed Sunday 20 years ago, he addressed above all those who are affected by a particular harsh trial; those crushed by the weight of the sins that they have committed; and those who have lost all confidence in life and are tempted to give into despair. To them the gentle face of Christ is offered, and from the heart of Jesus, the rays of His infinite love are meant for them; to touch them; to shine upon them; to warm them; to show them the way and to fill them with hope.

To continue: Pope Francis also describes mercy as the Divine attitude which embraces.

Here I am reminded of the beautiful parable of the prodigal son as related by Jesus, whose purpose was to reveal God as a loving, patient, forgiving and merciful father. The youngest son demands his inheritance, and squanders it in a distance land by what is described as loose living, (An analogy which covers the whole range of sin). After some time, the country faces a severe famine; the son is bankrupt morally, spiritually and without any funds to support himself. He is reduced to feeding the pigs and longs to eat the husks because of hunger. Finally, he comes to his senses, repents and returns to the father with the intent of becoming a slave in his father’s household. But the Father, who had been waiting for his son patiently, sees him afar and runs to meet him. The Father doesn’t wait for his son’s confession of guilt, neither does he chastise him. No! The father embraces his son with a kiss, puts on him a new robe, sandals and places a ring upon his finger signifying his sonship. Then the father kills the fatten calf in celebration of his sons return.

This parable is a perfect example of…. Mercy in the Divine attitude which embraces.

Finally, Pope Francis describes Mercy as God giving himself to us and bowing to forgive. Can there be any greater example of mercy than that of the Son of God hanging from the cross? *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son so that whoever should believe in Him, shall have eternal life.”* From the cross, Jesus, in the throws of great suffering and agony; in his infinite mercy and love; cried out, *“Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”*

4. Divine Mercy Sunday

 Our next question is, what is divine mercy Sunday, and why did Jesus explicitly (actually demanded), that this feast be celebrated on the 2nd Sunday of Easter and that his image be venerated? Jesus said, *“I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depth of my tender mercy is open. 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 forgiveness of sins and punishment. On that day all the divine floodgates, through which graces flows, are opened. Let no soul fear to draw near to me, even though its sins be scarlet.”* There are many more consoling promises for those who enter fully into this feast day. Jesus did however, issue these warnings if we did not entrust ourselves to His Divine Mercy.

*Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to my Mercy.*

*Let all mankind recognize my unfathomable mercy. It is a sign for the end times; after it, will come the day of justice.*

*He who refuses to pass through the door of my mercy must pass through the door of my justice.*

5. Veneration of the Image

 Let us now focus our attention on the veneration of the Divine Image. Jesus said, *“I demand the worship of my mercy through the solemn celebration of the feast and through the veneration of the image which is painted. By means of this image I shall grant many graces to souls. It is to be a reminder of the demands of my mercy, because even the strongest faith is of no avail without works.”* Jesus also promised, *“That the soul that will venerate this image will not perish. I also promise victory over its enemies already here on earth, especially at the hour of death.”*

Some people have a real problem when it comes to veneration. One question that was put forth about veneration was… *“I have a problem with this because it seems to fly in the face of the church’s teaching. Why would Jesus promise anyone that venerating an image would grant salvation? How does the church reconcile with its teachings on repentance of sin?”*

To be honest, I also had a problem on how a soul venerating a picture would not perish. One thing that we need to be clear about is that veneration is not adoration. To venerate a sacred image means to perform some act or make some gesture of deep religious respect toward it, because of the person whom it represents. As I pondered the question I asked myself, *“What is the purpose of veneration?”…* then it struck me. The purpose of veneration, especially the image of the Divine Mercy, is to invite us into contemplation. To move us from our self-centeredness, our selfishness, our self-seeking motives and dishonesty to a place where we enter Christ’s paschal mystery, (Jesus’ life, death and resurrection).

The caption *“Jesus I trust in you”*, brings us to the truth about our relationship with the Lord….If we worry constantly about the future; if we are plagued by fears and apprehension; if we are beset with feelings of frustrations, anxiety, or depression; If we lose all hope of overcoming addictions; anything that leaves us with a sense of hopelessness… Then we can be sure that we don’t fully trust in the Lord.

Veneration, therefor as Jesus promised, opens the floodgates of grace and moves us from all our troubles to an attitude of repentance, gratitude, forgiveness and love, especially for our fellow man. The more we trust, the greater will be the level of serenity and peace not to mention happiness.

6. Conclusion

 In today’s gospel, St. Thomas refused to believe his fellow apostles that they had seen the risen Lord. He said to them, *“Unless I see the mark of the nails in His hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and in his side, I will not believe.”*

The question that we need to ask ourselves is; do I believe St. Faustina, St. John Paul II, the church and all those who have given witness to the power of the divine mercy chaplet and the graces that emanated from venerating the Divine Mercy Image.

St. Thomas believe when Jesus appeared to him, offered His hands and side. He exclaimed, “My Lord and my God.”

Jesus said to him, *“Have you believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”*

As we celebrate this feast and venerate the Divine Mercy Image, let us bring to Jesus all our troubles, our sinfulness and our fears and say to him,

 “Jesus, I trust in you.”