

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD**  
**in**  
**THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY**  
**SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
**DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY**  
**April 16, 2023**

**LECTIONARY READINGS:**

<b>Acts 2:42-47</b>	<b>The early Church experiences itself in the joy of Easter.</b>
<b>1 Peter 1:3-9</b>	<b>The gift of faith surpasses all the splendor of gold.</b>
<b>John 20:19-31</b>	<b>With Thomas, we come to faith in the Risen Lord.</b>

**BIBLE BACKGROUND:**

**John:**

The Christian people are those who have been filled with the Spirit of God so that Jesus Christ, the Risen One, lives in them and works through them for the redemption of the world. The Spirit that Jesus “breathed” on his disciples that first day of his resurrection continues to be “breathed” on all who come to believe in him still today. The community of faith carries that Spirit within itself now and confers it on all whom God sends to it in faith. Just as the Spirit of God was present in Jesus throughout his life, giving divine power to his words and his works, so the Spirit of Jesus resides in the Church until the end of time, enabling the Church to proclaim the Good News and to do the works of salvation.

Jesus sends his disciples out to continue the ministry he has begun. At the heart of that ministry is to be found the forgiveness of sins. That is the great act of reconciliation for which Christ came. That is the heart of the work that must continue until the end of time. If the Church is truly the body of Christ in the world today, then the Church must engage in the ministry of reconciling all things in Christ for the glory of the Father.

Breathing the Spirit of God upon the disciples constitutes the act of re-creating humanity on the part of the Risen Christ who now shares openly in the same works as God the Father. The Spirit of God hovered over the waters at creation and all things came into being. The breath of God given into the nostrils of the first human is given again by Christ to restore the human race to its original place in fellowship with God.

In the Gospel of John, this scene of “peace and joy” conferred by Christ is the Pentecost event. (Luke situates it in time 50 days after the resurrection.) “Peace,” too, is a sign of reconciliation with God, a sign of divine forgiveness of our sins. If we are at peace with God through the power of Jesus Christ, then, surely, we are in a state of forgiveness. We cannot, at the same time, both be alienated from God in sin and be at peace with God.

Peace is the primary sign of harmony between people on earth. Peace is not just the absence of conflict; it can be found only as a result of a positive condition of union and interpersonal and mutual acceptance.

It would be useful if we were to evaluate our “rightness with God” on the basis of the amount of peace we are experiencing in our lives! Did Christ give peace, or did He not? Now, we get to the

Thomas episode: By referring to this apostle as the “Doubting Thomas,” we may have missed the whole point of John’s Gospel! Thomas represents the Church of the year 95-100 of the Common Era (CE). He “came to believe” later, just as we have come to believe in Christ later than those who have believed before us. Thomas comes to a fullness of faith that goes so far as to call Jesus “God!” That is the faith that we share after all these years. In our experience of suffering and pain, we have touched the wounds of Christ. We have entered into his side by enduring persecution. Having persisted in our commitment to the Lord through all kinds of trials, we can say: “My Lord and my God!” Only after we have been joined to the suffering and dying of Christ can we be united with him in his resurrection. Easter cannot be understood if we too quickly forget the reality of the Passion and death of Christ.

### **Acts:**

When people heard the message of the good news that Jesus who had been crucified was now Lord and Messiah by the power of God, they responded to Peter: “What must we do?” Faith leads to an action-response. It is not possible simply to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Master without acting on that belief. Faith leads to a transformation of life. Peter says that they must repent and be baptized. That is still the word addressed today to all who would follow up on the message of Easter: Repent and enter into the life of the Risen Christ!

### **Peter:**

Around the year 90 of the Common Era (CE), Christians in Asia Minor were severely persecuted by their pagan neighbors. They needed to hear a message of encouragement and consolation. This letter, written with the authority of Peter, reminds them (and us) that we too have walked through saving waters in our baptism just as the people of ancient Israel walked to freedom through the sea. We also have endured the trials of the desert in our difficult environment, as did the Jews of old in the years spent wandering in the wilderness. God is present with power in our lives even now.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. What evidence do you see in the life of the Christian community that we take seriously the words of Jesus about “setting people free?” Do you see much mutual forgiveness of sins? Are we always eager to forgive those who have done us wrong? How can forgiveness of sins be the great sign of Christ’s presence in the Church if we do not see much of it being done?
2. What can you and your parish community do to show more evidence that the Spirit of the Risen Lord has come upon you? If peace and joy are signs of the Resurrection, should we not be more at peace and more joyful? Do we really believe that Christ has in fact breathed his peace upon us?
3. The Church needs to admit its wounds if it is to identify with the Risen Christ. Christ always showed his wounds whenever he appeared after his resurrection. What can you do to imitate Christ who showed his hands and his feet whenever he appeared to his disciples? Complain about our sufferings? Let us show that we are redeemed sinners instead!

## PRAYER

**Tell the Lord  
how thankful we are,  
because he is kind  
and always merciful.  
With his mighty arm  
the Lord wins victories!  
The Lord is powerful!  
And so my life is safe,  
and I will live to tell  
what the Lord has done.**

(Psalm 118)

## CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Forgiveness of sins! Only God can forgive sins! Why does the Church indulge in a supposed forgiveness of sins? Aren't we a bit old-fashioned with our doctrine of forgiveness? Surely, you don't mean *literally* that the Church can forgive sins?

Yes, we mean *literally* that the Church as the body of Christ in the world even today can and does forgive sins. Moreover, we assert that the whole Church must be involved in forgiveness. Laypersons, too, are the Church, so they, too, are involved in the forgiveness of sins. In fact, we believe that the forgiveness of sins is one of the mighty signs by which the Church is identified as the embodiment of the Living Christ among us.

Next to proclaiming that God loves his people, there is no message more central to the teachings of Jesus than that "your sins are forgiven you." Whenever Jesus cures a person of some physical or spiritual ailment, he first says, "Yours sin are forgiven." Jesus always used the forgiveness of sins as a sign that the reign of God had come to earth. To be reconciled to God by forgiveness is to be introduced into the kingdom. The gap between heaven and earth is bridged by the act of forgiveness.

By baptism, we have been joined to Christ who reconciles us to God in his very flesh. Joined to Christ in mystical union through faith and baptism, we are no longer alienated from God. This constitutes the first moment of forgiveness of sins for us. Sin is incompatible with union with the Lord. As we are joined to Christ in baptism, we receive initial forgiveness and reconciliation. Sealed with the gift of the Father, which is the Holy Spirit in confirmation, we are united to Christ in a permanent manner: another experience of reconciliation. Then, called to the table of the Lord's supper in holy Communion, we enter into an ever more intimate union with Christ: again, we experience reconciliation.

The Eucharist becomes our daily and weekly experience of reconciliation as we enter into a sacramental union with the Lord of Mercy. Surely, the Church practices reconciliation and forgiveness of our ordinary, daily sins through the experience of the eucharistic celebration. If anyone has sinned mortally, then the Church exercises, in a particular way, for each sinner individually, a sacramental experience by which we are restored to grace by the power of Jesus Christ acting through the ministry of the Church.