

FR. JOHN'S HOMILY

Divine Mercy Sunday (2nd Sunday of Easter), April 11, 2021

The famous painting of Jesus standing outside the cottage, *Knocking*, was painted by English artist William Hunt at the age of 29. The painting illustrates the biblical passage in Revelation 3:20:

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, [then] I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me.”

Jesus, carrying a lantern, is depicted knocking at a door with no handle on the outside. The door is overgrown with weeds, and the nails and hinges are rusted, implying that the door has never been opened. The message: it is up to the person on the other side of the door to let Jesus in.

On this Divine Mercy Sunday, we have the image of Jesus Divine Mercy standing outside our doors, knocking. Will we open the door? We know that God's mercy is not new, it is as old and ancient as God's first revelations. God in His very nature is Love and Mercy itself. Jesus reveals the Divine Mercy of the Father through his words and deeds, and ultimately through passion, suffering, death and resurrection. Ephesians 2:4: *God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ, by grace you have been saved.*

In Jesus we can see God's richness of Mercy: caring for the poor, the oppressed, the sick, seeking out the sinners, this is Mercy. Nothing can separate us from God's love and mercy, however our hearts can prevent us from receiving it. Divine Mercy Sunday, established by John Paul II, through Saint Faustina from her journal on Divine Mercy. She has given us the ABC's of Divine Mercy: A-Ask for God's mercy, B-Be Merciful as God our Father is Merciful to us, C-Complete trust in Jesus. Many of us are aware of the devotion to Divine Mercy, the Novena prayers, and the chaplet - on this Sunday let us seek, receive, and be God's mercy.

God's mercy can set us free. We need the freedom found in Jesus, through His resurrection, light, and truth. I relate to the Apostles in the beginning days of Jesus' Resurrection when we find them still locked in the Upper Room because of fear. This is a self-isolating fear, which many of us deal with ourselves and on many levels, especially as we venture out, ever so cautiously and slowly from the pandemic. What are our fears? Whatever they may be, this Sunday is an invitation to freedom.

Look at the Gospel of John, we find the disciples locking themselves into a room because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. Even after an excited Mary Magdalene came to them from the empty tomb announcing that she had seen the Lord, this was not enough to overcome their fear. They were afraid that what happened to Jesus could happen to them. So they hid in the Upper Room.

The turning point came when the Risen Lord himself appeared to them behind their closed doors and helped them overcome their fear. He did this by breathing the Holy Spirit into them, filling them with new life and hope, freeing them from fear, and releasing them to share in his mission. “As the Father sent me, so am I sending you,” He

said. In the power of the Spirit they came to life and went out from their fears, and their self-imposed prison, to bear witness to the Risen Lord.

We can all find ourselves in the situation of those first disciples, locked in their hiding place. Fear is crippling the life of many. And it weakens our commitment to following the Lord. Like the disciples in today's Gospel, we can be tempted to give up on our faith journey. The will to protect ourselves can prevent us from doing what we are capable of doing with the Lord's help. Even when someone seems full of enthusiasm and hope like a Mary Magdalene, we shrug it off. We let them get on with it, while we hold back and stay safe.

The Gospel today suggests a way out of our fears and self-imposed prisons. If Mary Magdalene makes no impact on us, the Lord will find another way to enter our lives and to fill us with new life. No locked doors, nor even locked hearts, can keep Him out. He finds a way to enter into our lives, where we have chosen to retreat within. Jesus stands knocking waiting for us to open the door. The Risen Lord never ceases to recreate us and to renew us in His love.

Just as the disciples were unmoved by the good news of Mary Magdalene who had seen the Lord, so Thomas was unmoved by the witness of the disciples who told him they too had seen the Lord. Thomas, it seems, had an even harder heart to enter. He is one of those people who insist on certain conditions being met before he makes a move, "Unless I see, I can't believe." So Jesus the Risen Lord, just as He does with all of us, takes us where we are. The Lord now comes to Thomas in his doubt and disbelief. "Thomas, put your finger here."

Put your finger here and Thomas becomes a great believer, "My Lord and My God". Jesus comes to us and offer us a way to be free from fears, doubts and disbelief. Jesus' love and Mercy is here with us, and accepts us, just as we are. He knows we have fears and doubts. And so He comes to us, behind any lock part of ourselves that is crying out for freedom.

The early Church living in freedom of Christ is the picture that Luke gives us in today's reading from Acts. He describes a community of believers, the church, witnessing to the Resurrection both in word and by the quality of their living. Everyone lived in the spirit of Christ love, and no one was in need. This is the call of every Christian Community. This is our witness for the world, by the way we witness Christ's love to one another. The world needs to see this in us, in all Christian communities.

We might pray this Easter season for the openness to receive the Lord's coming into our life anew. We can make Thomas' prayer our own, "My Lord and my God", when we receive Jesus today in Communion. Divine Mercy stand before us today, knocking. "Jesus, I trust in You."