

Homily for Mercy Sunday
By Bishop Felipe Estévez
April 19, 2020

“Give thanks to the Lord for He is good for He is good for his mercy endures forever.”
Psalms 118

I’m honored to greet the participants of the Virtual Rosary Congress today from the Diocese of St. Augustine. We are so blessed that your love for the Eucharistic Lord and Our Lady have brought together the practice of perpetual adoration with the mysteries of the rosary prayed for every hour. This week, which concludes with this Mass is so fruitful. We experienced the first Diocesan Rosary Congress in our diocese last year!

The eighth day of Easter celebration comes to us at a time when we need it the most: a message of hope and revival of our faith, especially now when most of us are deprived of the sacraments due to this global health emergency. Today, we thank St. Pope John Paul II, who was both beatified and canonized on Mercy Sunday. I will never forget our own diocesan pilgrimage to Rome in April 2014 for the canonization of John Paul II and John XXIII on Mercy Sunday.

Jesus taught: Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. The name of God is mercy because God is love. And God so loved the world that he gave us his Son to redeem us. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the greatest act of mercy because Christ, the redeemer, overcomes sin, hate and despair, giving us grace, joy, peace – true love. As we prayed on the Paschal Vigil Mass Exsultet: “Oh happy fault that earned for us so great, so glorious a Redeemer.”

In most of our parishes, we venerate the image of the Risen Lord where he stands with one hand outstretched in blessing, and the other clutching his side wounded by the spear, from which proceed beams of falling light, colored red and white representing blood and water as stated in the Gospel of John 19:34. The image also has the polish words, Jesus I trust in Thee. *Jezu Ufam Tobie*. This image was first through a personal revelation given to St. Faustina Kowalski to remind the world of divine mercy as our refuge and light of hope. It is from the pierced side of the crucified Christ that the church is born with the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist encountering the saving love of God for us – giving us the Spirit and the sacraments for our salvation.

On Divine Mercy Sunday, the church presents to us the story of Thomas the Apostle who was the first to ask for evidence that Christ was truly alive. It is wonderful to know the humility of the Risen Lord, who meets Thomas, where he is at in his unbelief and stubbornness. The Lord appears to Thomas and the disciples inviting Thomas to put his hands in his divine wound. Right then, Thomas is overcome by the merciful Christ saying from the heart: My Lord and my God.

This privileged personal encounter that Thomas had was indeed, unique. Still, the Lord anticipating the many generations to come who wouldn’t have this direct proof praises all believers of all times: “Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”

We have not had a direct and personal encounter with the Risen Lord, but like the disciples of Emmaus, we encounter the Lord in the breaking of the bread – the Sunday Mass – and by listening to the Gospels. It is through those who are anointed by the Holy Spirit for our sake, especially meeting Christ in the poor, the least of the brethren, the ones on the margins of society who by our seven works of mercy provide mercy to us in return.

The coronavirus has been devastating in many ways throughout the world, but the Lord has not abandoned us. Fear is overcome by faith. He promised: I will be with you always. His covenant love is especially present in times of tribulation. During these difficult times, families have rediscovered the comfort of being together, connecting as never before. Parents have become teachers at home and leaders of faith to their sons and daughters. The family that prays together stays together has been widely verified in multiple ways, especially by the prayer of the rosary.

So many faithful have contacted me, revealing their hunger for the sacraments of faith and sharing their need for the faith community. We have admired the selfless care of first responders, health care workers, and community officials – all caring for the common good and the safety of all. The entire nation has given witness to collaborating with the national guidelines in active citizenship and civic virtues.

The living Christ is inseparable from his body, the church. The first disciples who encountered the Risen Christ “devoted themselves to the teaching of the Apostles and the communal life, to the breaking of bread (the way St. Luke talks about the Mass, the Eucharist), and to prayers.” Here we find the image of the early church, the first nucleus of an expanding faith community moved to mission by the energy of the Holy Spirit, for as Scriptures says, “and every day, the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”

The importance of divine Mercy is for us to be reassured that our sins are forgiven and that God, who is so rich in mercy, will welcome us one day in paradise. True, we all want to be saved, but the revelation of divine mercy came at a time of unbelievable cruelty of systematic evil against the dignity of the human person, which resulted in great despair. We need to be more than ever, messengers of God’s mercy for us. The urgency of the Gospel message is greater now than ever before as we overcome this pandemic.

Let me finish by quoting Pope St. John II: “As people of this restless time of ours, wavering between the emptiness of self-exaltation and the humiliation of despair, we have a greater need than ever for a regenerating experience of mercy. We should learn to say repeatedly to God with the faith and simplicity of children: ‘Great is our sin, but even greater is your love!’” (Vespers hymn for the season of Lent)

Opening ourselves to mercy, we must not be content with mediocrity and sin, but on the contrary, we must be revived by resolutions to lead a new life.

3. O Mary, Mother of mercy! You know the heart of your divine Son better than anyone. Instill in us the filial trust in Jesus practiced by the saints, the trust that animated Blessed Faustina Kowalska, the great apostle of Divine Mercy in our time.

Look lovingly upon our misery: O Mother, draw us away from the contrary temptations of self-sufficiency and despair, and obtain for us an abundance of saving mercy.”