

2nd Sunday of Easter, Year "A"

The Risen Jesus Appears to the Apostles (Divine Mercy Sunday)

On this Divine Mercy Sunday, I remember the story of two men who were seriously ill and confined to a hospital where they occupied the same room. One of them was lying in the bed near the only window in their room. Every day he was allowed to spend some time sitting up in his bed to help drain the fluid from his lungs. The other man was forced to spend all his days lying flat on his back.

They talked a lot about their lives, families, jobs, vacations. Each time, the man sitting by the window would describe in detail all that he saw outside the window. His roommate always looked forward to those moments when his world would be broadened and brightened up by the beautiful world outside.

Amazing views of a park with a beautiful lake could be seen from the window of their room. Children were delightfully playing among the ducks and swans. Couples were walking arm-in-arm among colorful flowers. Also, the stunning city skyline could be seen.

As the man by the window had been thoroughly describing all that was happening outside the window, his roommate would close his eyes and imagine all the beautiful scenes of life that were being narrated to him.

One night the man, whose bed was near the window, died peacefully during his sleep, and his roommate was very sad.

After some time, when the nurse came to visit him, he asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse agreed and kindly made the switch. When she left, the man slowly and painfully propped himself up on one elbow and took his first look at the world outside. He was stunned. The window faced a blank wall.

When the nurse came to visit him the next time, he told her about the beautiful things outside the window that his roommate described to him. The nurse replied that his roommate was a blind man. She said, "Probably he just tried to encourage you." *(Culled from short inspirational story about encouragement)*

We really need to encourage one another, especially during this coronavirus season. We once longed for the time when we could stay at home to enjoy the beauty of the home, and it feels good to stay at home, especially after working so hard, but not so much when staying at home is due to a lockdown. Staying at home feels like a punishment, even when we know it is for our own safety and for the good of others.

What we are feeling today staying at home is no different from what the apostles were feeling after the crucifixion of Jesus as they locked themselves up in the Upper Room for fear of the Jews.

Jewish contemporaries of Jesus see Him as a revolutionary and a law breaker who had little or no respect for Jewish tradition because Jesus healed on the Sabbath and called Himself the "Son of God," thus making Himself equal to God. Knowing His parents and lineage, the Jews could not accept any of His claims about being the Messiah; hence, they found a way to kill Him.

After killing Jesus, it is obvious that the next target would be the disciples of Jesus. If the Jews could kill Jesus without any repercussions, then getting rid of the apostles would pose little or no problem. Hence, the apostles were justified in hiding from the killers of their Master. Coupled with the hiding is this feeling of discouragement because Jesus did not satisfy the apostles' false notion of a conquering messiah. They could not imagine how a messiah could be nailed to the cross and die without putting up a fight.

At this lowest ebb of their plight, lo and behold, another puzzle arises – here comes good news from Mary Magdalene, Salome, and the other Mary that Jesus is alive. Now the apostles are not only discouraged but also confused, not knowing what to believe and the way forward.

Jesus reappears in their midst, not as a blind man, but as a messiah, to restore hope in the apostles during their moment of despair. In this we see the true nature of the God we worship. God's love is immutable and unconditional. God is there for us in both good and bad times. God knows how strong we are and how easy it is for us to despair when confronted with realities beyond our comprehension.

If Jesus could reach out to the apostles in their brokenness, there is no doubt that Jesus would not abandon us during this coronavirus pandemic. Even when our parishioners cannot gather to celebrate the Eucharist, in my private celebration of the mass, I always lift up my parishioners, friends, and benefactors to God in prayer.

It is no coincidence that the message of Jesus on this Divine Mercy Sunday is "Peace be with you." "Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to My Mercy" (St. Faustina's *Diary* 300). Peace is not just the way: It is the only way forward. As there is no mercy without peace, so is there no peace without mercy. Peace is the greatest gift needed in the world today to overcome the ravaging effects of the coronavirus pandemic. With Christ's peace in our hearts, we shall overcome.

Like the apostles, we have the option to choose peace or live in despair. Christ's peace is not borne out of the absence of war, but from the determination to fight. Hence, the Latin adage, "*Si vis pacem, para bellum*" – "If you want peace, prepare for war." It takes an act of war to survive this COVID-19 moment, and our weapon is prayer.

As St. Faustina received from Jesus, "My Heart overflows with great mercy for souls, and especially for poor sinners. If only they could understand that I am the best of Fathers to them and that it is for them that the Blood and Water flowed from My Heart as from a fount overflowing with mercy" (*Diary 367*). Our ability to see, receive, and extend Christ's peace to others becomes our common mission in the world today.

Let us encourage one another ... let us pray for peace ... and let us show mercy to all.

My prayer is that all God's children may experience the peace of Christ. This is the peace that the world cannot give. May all who embrace this peace be blessed. Alleluia, Amen!