

Easter II  
4/16/2023

## RECONCILIATION, FORGIVENESS, MERCY AND FAITH

Jesus' ministry was one of reconciliation, forgiveness and mercy. We find this in so many of his parables. Think of the Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep and most of, the Prodigal Son. We find it in his teachings, *forgive and you will be forgiven*. We find it in his prayer, *forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us*. We find it in his actions. Think of Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners. Ponder the woman taken in adultery or Zacchaeus. Most of all, we see it in his suffering, death and resurrection, in his Paschal Mystery that we continue to celebrate. From the cross he cries out for forgiveness for those who are torturing him to death, while they are in the very act of doing it.

And that all leads us to today. The first words of the risen Christ to his disciples aren't words of recrimination or scolding but rather of peace. Now in Hebrew, peace, *shalom* means hello, but it can also have a deeper meaning than our word of peace. *Shalom* isn't just the absence of conflict but a presence. It's blessing, prosperity, goodness and justice.

After that, the risen Christ does something both beautiful, shocking and even scandalous. He entrusts this ministry of reconciliation to his disciples, to his Church. *He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.'* This is the strongest scriptural reference for the Sacrament of Reconciliation or confession. But it doesn't stop there.

We're called to share in the Sacrament of Reconciliation but the Church and every Christian is called to illustrate peace, reconciliation and mercy. What we do in the sacrament, we're called to do with the rest of our lives. To quote the Prayer of St. Francis, we're to be *instruments of peace*. The base of the word reconciliation involves our scilla, that is to say, our eye lashes. Reconciliation to restore what was lost and once again to see eye to eye. It is to act with mercy.

Biblically, mercy isn't just one attribute of God but the principal attribute of God. And on this Divine Mercy Sunday, we continue to remember many works of God's mercy, and the greatest act of God's mercy, the death and resurrection of Jesus. Literally, mercy means a stirring in the gut, or even a stirring in the womb. God's

mercy doesn't call us to be irresponsible or even to be presumptuous about God's forgiveness. Rather, in mercy, God calls us to greater intimacy, to deeper union with him. God's mercy tells us that there is another way than our sins.

God's mercy tells us that God has a better plan for us and that he wants to help us walk in that better way. God helps us through his word, and through his sacraments, especially reconciliation and Eucharist. He helps us through prayer, through the communion of saints, especially the Blessed Mother, who inspire us with their example and assist us with their prayers. He helps us through each other as we journey to God together, as members of the Body of Christ, as members of his Church.

Sometimes God's mercy may seem too good to be true, too much to believe and humanly speaking that's understandable but fortunately, God doesn't have a human mind. It requires faith. Not just the faith *in which* we believe, the content of our faith, which is very important but additionally, the faith *by which* we believe. This gospel speaks to us not only about peace, reconciliation, forgiveness and mercy but it also speaks to us about faith.

The risen Christ shows Thomas his wounds but it's been said that there are two sets of wounds. The wounds that the risen Christ still bears. These wounds are seen and then there are the wounds of Thomas' disbelief. The visible wounds of Christ heal the invisible wounds of Thomas' disbelief. In turn, Thomas makes the fullest profession of anyone in the Bible. He says, *My Lord and my God.*

Jesus gives himself to us through his life, death and resurrection and he continues to give himself to us. This reading concludes saying that the purpose of the gospel is to give us faith and the purpose of faith is to give us eternal life. Gospel—faith—eternal life. That's all rather clear. Not necessarily easy but clear. *Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed.*

As we continue to glory in the divine mercy and light of the risen Christ, we pray that we may follow the risen Christ with lives of reconciliation, forgiveness and mercy. We pray that as for Thomas, the wounds of Christ may heal the wounds of our unbelief and that the gospel may lead us to lives of deep faith, intentional faith that lead us all to eternal life.