

2nd Sunday of Easter – Divine Mercy Sunday – April 23, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Psalm: Ps 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

R. (1) Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.

Let the house of Israel say,
"His mercy endures forever."

Let the house of Aaron say,
"His mercy endures forever."

Let those who fear the LORD say,
"His mercy endures forever."

I was hard pressed and was falling,
but the LORD helped me.
My strength and my courage is the LORD,
and he has been my savior.
The joyful shout of victory
in the tents of the just.

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.
By the LORD has this been done;
it is wonderful in our eyes.
This is the day the LORD has made;
let us be glad and rejoice in it.

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you who by the power of God are safeguarded through faith, to a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the final time. In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Although you have not seen him you love him; even

though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Gospel: John 20:19-31

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, 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." Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." Now, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

So what is the trouble for this man in the Gospel? His doubts echo through history. We often assume that he was just a tough guy who had trouble trusting, but it would help you and me in our own doubts if we could understand more about someone who couldn't believe in the resurrection. We call him Doubting Thomas. First, who was he? His real name in Aramaic, Te'oma (Thomas), meant twin, and he was also called Didymus, which meant the same thing in Greek. So he likely was a twin, perhaps of Matthew. He might have been a bit glum. For instance, he gave a practical but gloomy response when Jesus wanted to go back to Judea after Lazarus died. None of the disciples wanted to go there, because they knew the leaders had tried to stone Jesus (John 10:24-30). Now Jesus gave some high-minded talk about how much they would learn by going, but Thomas ignored these reasons. His sarcastic reply is a perfect picture of him: "Alright, let us also go die with him" (John 11:16).*

These tough words are really a protection for a heart that would break in pieces if it were fooled by another false hope.

Here, Thomas reminds me a bit of Joe Btfsplk, the famous Al Capp cartoon character from yesteryear who walked around with a perpetual rain cloud over his head! Much later, just before the passion, Jesus will say, "Where I am going you know the way." This was really a spiritual statement about going to the Father, but Thomas took it literally (John 14:3-6). He gives a very matter-of-fact response, but rooted in emotion. To summarize, he says, "You're talking in secrets! We can't follow you if don't say where you are going! Help us." Thomas loved Jesus doggedly, that is for sure. But he feared the dangerous situations that Jesus always walked right into. Thomas' practical nature looked frankly at them and drew the pragmatic, pessimistic conclusion. Thomas the twin had twin emotions, love and fear. Is it any wonder, then, that in this Sunday's Gospel Thomas laid down unflinching requirements for believing in the resurrection? Take a look. His worst fears already had come true: Jesus had been killed. To deal with this sorrow Thomas resolved to accept the death stolidly. He would never slip and talk about his departed friend in the present tense, as if he were still here. Thomas the pragmatist knew that Jesus was dead and gone. Thomas had predicted it. Then came the new news. "Didymus, Jesus is alive! You were away, but suddenly he stood there among us even though all the doors were locked! He talked to us!" No. NO! Thomas' heart could not accept it. He wanted it too much. He could not bear to believe it. Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe. This is exactly in character for Thomas/Didymus. These tough words are really a protection for a heart that would break in pieces if it were fooled by another false hope. "The only way I would believe such nonsense is if you give me absolute proof." Jesus gave it. Fingers in nail marks, hand in side. Thomas had always belonged to Jesus. Yes he was cynical, but when he got the practical proof he needed, he sank to the ground in heart-rending surrender. "My Lord and my God." What a great story for us at Eastertide.

*Jesus then told them, "Our friend Lazarus is asleep, but I am going to awaken him." So the disciples said to him, "Master, if he is asleep, he will be saved." But Jesus was talking about his death, while they thought that he meant ordinary sleep. So then Jesus said to them clearly, "Lazarus has died. And I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe. Let us go to him" (John 11: 11-15).

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Can you describe this early Christian community in a short sentence? Are there other groups that fit your description? How is your faith strengthened by the faith of others? Why did they "eat their meals with exultation"? What fills you with "awe"?
2. Hans Urs von Balthazar says this: "We are not the ones who grasp Christ and anchor ourselves to him. Rather, Christ has caught up with us and grasped us." Which of these "graspings" makes you feel more secure? How does Balthazar's sentence relate to this reading's sentence, "God ... gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection"?
3. "Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst." Can any doors be locked tight enough to keep Christ out? Explain. Do you yourself have "locked doors"? How is peace connected with forgiveness of sins?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following: God of everlasting mercy, who in the very recurrence of the paschal feast kindle the faith of the people you have made your own, increase, we pray, the grace you have bestowed, that all may grasp and rightly understand in what font they have been washed, by whose Spirit they have been reborn, by whose Blood they have been redeemed. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen