

Sunday of Divine Mercy – April 8, 2018 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Acts 4:32-35

The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all. There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need.

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 John 5:1-6

Beloved: Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God, and everyone who loves the Father loves also the one begotten by him. In this way we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments. For the love of God is this, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whoever is begotten by God conquers the world. And the victory that conquers the world is our faith. Who indeed is the victor over the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is the one who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by water alone, but by water and blood. The Spirit is the one that testifies, and the Spirit is truth.

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

Do you believe in the Resurrection of Our Lord from the dead? This is a good question to ask, at least so St. Paul says, because if the answer is “no,” then “our faith is in vain” (1 Cor 15:14-19). But sometimes it is hard to know what the “resurrection” is. Couldn’t it even be just bringing Jesus back to life so he could go on as before, just a limited ordinary life, as Kazantzakis and Dan Brown have portrayed it? Here is a metaphor to suggest a better answer. *There is a spiritual soil that everything else sprouts from. In his death, Jesus plunged deep down into this soil. He had stumbled, fallen, and had lost the very thing we think is irreplaceable and to be guarded beyond all else: life.* But think about it. Isn’t life just another garden plant, sprouting from some rich loam, one that we hardly notice. Yes? Well, that spiritual soil is called love: vast and quiet love. “Doubting Thomas” from Sunday’s Gospel was broken-hearted because he thought that such love had died. He warded off his grief by simple denial. “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”!

And in the gospel of Luke it was the women, not the men, who had seen the empty tomb and the angels, and they took it seriously. But “... their words seemed an idle tale, and [the disciples] did not believe” (Lk 24:11). In Matthew, Jesus came first to the women, who told the men where he would meet them. They went and “worshipped him, but they doubted” (Mt 28:17). In Mark, Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, but when she went to the apostles, you guessed it, they rejected her testimony (Mk 16:9). Nor did they listen to the men who had met Jesus walking to Emmaus (Mk 16:12-13). Hard to miss the fact that women usually believed and men usually did not. The women dared to trust what they saw. Dan Brown’s *Da Vinci Code* goes several steps further. For him, males have purposely repressed the essence of Christianity. His real truth, guarded through centuries, is that Mary Magdalene was Jesus’ secret wife! Moreover, a flesh and blood descendent from Jesus is alive today (a woman, living outside our “me too” times, and in fear for her life). Obviously if the gospels are just huge cover-ups, then the resurrection would be just one more spin of the glittering wheel of deception.

But what about the vast and quiet love we spoke about above? Jesus’ life, death and resurrection aimed us toward the source of all life, the source of the universe, of worlds, of women and men, of marriage and offspring, and taking on the trials of others. Jesus is the river of love that God had poured into the world, now flowing back into the ocean of the Trinity and taking us along, whichever of us chooses to believe. So, can you live by this resurrection? If you can, then you can believe that love is the foundation of life. 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 (Gospel).

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Who are the needy people in your immediate life? Can you take care of at least some of their privations? What, if anything, can you do about the lacks of people in your extended world? If you joined forces with another person or group could you do something to alleviate some needs of these people?
2. “... Does what you have done make you a Christian, or what Christ has done? Which is more important, belief in Jesus or performance of good deeds? If you believe deeply and personally in Jesus will good deeds spring from that belief and love?
3. What is the significance of Jesus’ breath when he gave the disciples the Holy Spirit? Is it the same Holy Spirit you receive in Baptism and Confirmation? Jesus empowered his disciples with his Spirit so they could pass the gift of peace on to others. He said to them, “Whose sins you forgive are forgiven.” How is peace related to 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.