

## Homily for 2nd Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday)

Today we celebrate the richness, meaning, participation in and application of God's mercy for us. This day we cry out with St. Thomas: "My Lord and My God" (Jn 20:28). This is the day of the covenant, the covenant of God's merciful love. We ratify the covenant of mercy by receiving the Body and Blood, soul and divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. This is the day we celebrate God's mercy! His mercy is infinite! His mercy is greater than sin, than evil, than suffering, than death! In His mercy we have victory, salvation and eternal life. What does "mercy" mean? To understand the meaning of mercy, it will help if we examine its etymology. Our English word, mercy, goes back to the Latin: misericordia, which is composed of two words. "Cordia" is familiar to us from such words as "cardiologist" and "cardiac." It means heart. The first part, "miseri" refers to suffering. Mercy, then, means to have a heart for those who suffer or, more precisely, to have a heart willing to suffer for others. Today's readings reveal that kind of heart in Christ and in his followers. When Jesus appeared to his disciples that first Easter, he said, "Peace be with you." The peace which Jesus won for us had cost him his blood, his very life. What that peace involved, Jesus tells us clearly: "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them..." To his apostles Jesus communicates the Holy Spirit with the power to free men from their sins. That freedom or absolution comes through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. To experience God's mercy sins are to be forgiven through the sacrament of reconciliation. *One day, the Police Department in a small country town, received a phone call from a worried citizen who reported that he had seen the same car pass by his home five times. That in itself would not have been enough to call out the police. But, the caller continued. The car was driving in reverse. Police later reported that they stopped a teen-age girl after a number of complaints that a car had been seen going around the neighbourhood in reverse for some time. When the police approached the stopped vehicle, the girl had a very logical explanation of her strange behaviour. She told police that her parents had let her use the car, but they had reversed their decision when they discovered that she had put too many miles on it. "I was just trying to unwind some of it," she said. Well, we can't unwind the past but only seek for forgiveness and mercy.*

In his appearance to his disciples, after his greeting of 'Peace be with you', Jesus performs three significant actions: 1) Jesus commissions them. He sends them out: "As the Father sent me, so am I sending you". 2) After this, "He breathed on them and said: Receive the Holy Spirit". 3) Finally, on the same occasion, Jesus institutes the Sacrament of Reconciliation. "If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained". Then Jesus allows Thomas to touch him and believe. This is the real mercy. Mercy can be understood in two ways: a) Not getting something bad that one deserves. Our sins deserve punishment, but God does not punish us according to our sins (Ps 103:10). This is Divine Mercy. We experience this mercy very tangibly in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. b) Getting the good that one does not deserve. This is Grace – unmerited favour; gratuitous gift. This is also Divine Mercy. We experience this every time we earnestly turn to God. From the Acts of the Apostles we glimpse mercy in action. The early Christians were so filled with the Holy Spirit that "no one claimed any of his possessions as his own." Rather, they "distributed to each according to his need. Part of mercy involves the effort to provide every human being with access to this world's blessings. The reading from Acts, then, calls our attention to the corporal works of mercy: feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless and so on. Ultimately mercy results not so much from human effort as from God's free gift. As Shakespeare said, "It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven." During the this time of Easter, we ask God to open our hearts so that we might receive into our hearts his Mercy .