

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

On this Second Sunday of Easter, renamed Divine Mercy Sunday by the now-canonized St. John Paul II, our Gospel text takes us back to that first Easter night. Even though they had heard about the empty tomb from Peter and John; even though Mary Magdalen had told them of recognizing Jesus, whom she thought was a gardener, until he called her by name, “Mary”, still John tells us the disciples were hidden in a house with the doors locked for fear of those who had crucified Jesus. They were cowering in fear, shame, confusion, disappointment, discouragement, and doubt. Then, “Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” And to dispel all doubt that it was really him, that he was really alive, “he showed them his hands and his side”.

Let’s back up for a moment to those “locked doors”. Might we consider for a moment what do we have locked up in our hearts, our minds, our spirits? How much fear or shame or confusion or disappointment or discouragement or doubt do we have locked up inside ourselves? Most of us have some of that locked within. How are we to deal with it? Wouldn’t it be wonderful if the Risen Christ would walk through those locked doors within us and dispel all that by saying, “Peace be with you”.

I believe that is what he intended to do when, as St. John records it in today’s Gospel reading, the next thing Jesus says is, “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.”

In these words Jesus gave to his disciples which has been passed on to the Church the power, not only to forgive sin, but in so doing bestow his gift of Peace on all whose hearts are troubled.

Now, listen to the beautiful words of absolution the priest says in the Sacrament of Reconciliation: “God the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of His Son has reconciled the whole world to Himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of our sins. Through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace and I absolve you from all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”.

Don’t you see? Not only are your sins forgiven, but the peace which comes with the forgiveness unlocks the doors of our hearts, our minds, our spirits. We are set FREE!

With that freedom comes the revelation that we heard about in our second reading from the 1st Letter of St. Peter: “Although you have not seen him you love him; even though you do not see him now yet you believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

The goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls here doesn't just mean we're going to get to heaven some day, it also means, in the here and now, we are free to live our lives without being overwhelmed by fear, shame, and confusion; discouragement, disappointment, and doubt.

We become free of the attractions and distractions that have us worrying about what we have or don't have; what others think of us or how they treat us. We become so free we start seeing what others need. We want to help others become free too. Our lives are no longer about us, but about bringing that "indescribable and glorious joy" we have in knowing and loving Christ to others as we read about in our 1st reading today from the Acts of the Apostles. Our Easter joy becomes more than just shouting ALLELUIA in Church, it becomes the shouting of ALLELUIA with our lives. We are to live our ALLELUIA! That is the freedom and the joy exemplified by the lives of our newest saints, St. John XXIII and St. John Paul II, as well as our Pope Francis I.

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, come back to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Allow the mercy of God to wash over you! With hearts and minds and spirits unlocked, become so joyful, free, generous, and giving that your life shouts ALLELUIA!

PEACE BE WITH YOU!