

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

April 19, 2020 A

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Risen Christ, we gather in your name to celebrate your victory over sin, evil and death. As you breathed your Spirit on those gathered in the Upper Room, breathe your Spirit on us so that we may recognize your presence in our midst and come to know you in the breaking open of your Word. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: During the Easter season, the first reading is from the Acts of the Apostles authored by Luke. Acts, among other things, illuminates for us the mystery of the Church as it developed from its beginnings at Pentecost. This week's readings identify several characteristics of the communal life of the first Christians. During Cycle A of the Easter season, the second reading is from the First Letter of Peter. The letter is addressed to Christians who were suffering harassment and persecution from their non-Christian neighbors. The author of the letter encourages his readers to persevere in faith so that their detractors would marvel at the good things God had done for them, be motivated to turn from their sinful ways and live lives of goodness. During the Easter season, the Gospel is nearly always from John. Two experiences of the Risen Christ are included in this week's reading. The second Sunday of Easter is also *Divine Mercy Sunday*, which celebrates the wonderful mercy of God – popularized in recent times by St. Faustina Kowalska, a Polish nun who had apparitions of Jesus in which he makes known his mercy for humanity. Our parish motto is “*Our Mission is Mercy and Love.*”

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Acts 2:42-47

These verses are the first of three summary statements on the community life of the early Christians. *Four characteristics* are identified: instruction/teaching, table-fellowship, prayer, and sharing all things in common. These verses are an idealized version of how a community filled with the Spirit *should* live.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 118

This is a prayer of thanksgiving to God for deliverance.

SECOND READING: 1Peter 1:3-9

This letter is addressed to several Gentile Christian communities living in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), recently converted to Christianity. The communities are suffering harassment and ostracization for being followers of Christ. They are made to

feel like marginal people, ‘aliens’ in the society in which they live. A very existential question for them would have been: How can a person continue to be faithful to Christ in such a hostile environment? This pastoral letter seeks to give encouragement to Christians living in such hostile environment. The letter also contains a list of exhortations on things like household duties, husband/wife relations, and concern for the public face of the church living in a pagan society.

The God of Jesus Christ is praised for giving us, through Jesus, a new birth, a new hope, and an imperishable inheritance (Heaven). The gift offered to us is very precious and worth suffering for. The ‘inheritance’ of the believer is God himself. This is cause for rejoicing even in the midst of trials.

God's presence does not mean that we will not suffer, but it does mean that we will have the strength to endure it. The power of the Resurrection at work in us

gives us the ability to endure whatever comes our way. 'Faith' is described in terms of a love and a trust without sight (v.8). Joy in the midst of trial springs from the realization that the road to salvation has been secured.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: John 20:19-31

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: John 20:19-31

John shares with us two Resurrection appearances of Jesus. The first appearance is sometimes called John's Pentecost because during it, Jesus imparts his Spirit. Prior to Jesus' coming, the disciples were filled with *fear* (of the authorities, hence the locked doors), *guilt* (for abandoning Jesus) and *depression* (because of Jesus' death). With Jesus' entry into their lives, the fear, guilt and depression are replaced with joy and peace. Then Jesus commissions his disciples to continue his work, but not before he gives them his Spirit. He also gives them the power to forgive sins, something the Catholic Church acts on in and through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Sins would only be 'retained' if one were not truly sorry for his/her sins or were unwilling to embrace the teachings of Jesus.

Some scholars see Jesus' appearance to Thomas as representing the second generation of Christians—those called to believe on the testimony of *others*. Even though Thomas refuses to believe the testimony of others, those following him will be called to come to faith on the testimony of others.

Though we may judge Thomas harshly, Jesus takes him where he is at. From Thomas, we learn how to be honest with our doubts. If Thomas needs to touch the wounds of Christ, Jesus will oblige him. The Gospel does not say that Thomas actually touches the wounds—only that he cries out in faith: "My Lord and my God." It is a story for all of us who may sometimes experience doubt concerning matters of faith. Jesus, too, will be patient with us and will help us overcome our doubts if we cooperate with his grace-filled touch

upon our lives. To *believe* in Jesus' Resurrection implies an intellectual assent. It also means that we too are *sent* to share the Good News with others.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse or image in the readings caught your attention or drew you in. Was there a verse or aspect of the readings that challenged you?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. The first reading describes the communal life of the early Christians. What motivated you to join a Small Christian Community? How is your participation a blessing in your life?

3. In the Gospel, Jesus brings the gift of 'Peace' to the fear-filled disciples. How would you describe the gift of peace that Jesus gives us, gives you?

4. If you sometimes experience doubt in your faith life, what helps you to deal with it?

5. On this Divine Mercy Sunday, we rejoice in God's mercy and love for us. What helps you live a life of mercy and love towards others?

6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Practice mercy. Pray for all experiencing doubt in their faith life. Pray for all received into Full Communion at the Easter Vigil, that they will have staying power (in Christ) to remain committed to their new Church family.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, in today's Gospel you bring peace, joy and mercy to disciples who are*

*fearful and depressed. Fill me with these Easter gifts
of peace, joy and mercy.*

**CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING,
PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

Facilitator: Let us pray for all who were received into
our Church at the Easter Vigil. Pray for persecuted
Christians.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Jesus,
breathe on us your Holy Spirit
so that we can live our lives more like you
and be filled with your peace, joy and mercy.
Amen.*