

2nd Easter Sunday "Divine Mercy", 16 April 2023

Scriptures: Acts..Apostles 2:42-47; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

Homily: Fr. Ken

This weekend we join Catholics throughout the world celebrating "Divine Mercy Sunday", the second Sunday of Easter.

It is fitting, if not also ironic, that we celebrate mercy at the very time that mercy seems absent, but so much more needed now throughout the United States and throughout the world.

There have been a number of books written in part or in whole by Pope Francis during his ten-year pontificate. A few years ago, a book was published with his theological and personal reflections on the topic of mercy. It became very popular, remaining more than four months on the *New York Times* best-selling list.

The book is titled: *The Name of God Is Mercy*. A number of our parishioners have read the book. The title comes from a quote of Pope Francis within the book. The book consists of a lengthy interview of Pope Francis conducted by a well-known Italian journalist. The book has been published in 22 languages, in 86 countries around the world.

Pope Francis states: "Mercy is the first attribute of God. The name of God is mercy. There are no situations we cannot get out of; we are not condemned to sink into quicksand". He adds: "Mercy is the divine attribute that embraces; it is God's self-giving that welcomes".

Pope Francis continues: "Jesus goes and heals and integrates the marginalized, the ones who are outside the city, the one's outside the encampment. In so doing, he shows us the way".

Regardless of our age, our talents, our life experiences, each and every one of us—different as we are—we are called by God, as sisters and brothers of Jesus, to become people of mercy.

After all, Jesus chose twelve very different individuals. There was a core of fishermen: Peter, Andrew, James, and John. There was also a tax collector, Matthew.

They also came from different places around the Sea of Galilee, and they expressed strong feelings about other villages.

Nathanael even said: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” One of them was a religious patriot, Simon the Zealot.

Jesus took them and taught them to bury their differences and work together, although occasionally this went wrong, as when James and John put in a bid for preferential treatment. He issued them with basic rules for going out to preach the kingdom of God: not to take extra clothes or spare cash; to accept hospitality where offered; not to hang out where they were not wanted. He gave them the power to cast out evil spirits and to cure diseases.

They all received the same direction from Jesus, that they all become faithful disciples of mercy.

But the time did come when individual character triumphed over training. In so far as there was unity among them, it unraveled at, and after, the Last Supper itself. Judas went off and betrayed Jesus. Peter made extraordinary promises, but lost his nerve and denied Jesus. The others made themselves scarce when the crucifixion loomed. Only John was there at the foot of the cross.

And after the resurrection, none of them believed Mary Magdalene when she said she had seen the risen Lord. Peter and John hastened to the empty tomb, saw the shroud, but with different results: John believed, but Peter was not sure what to think. Ten of the twelve barricaded themselves in the upper room out of fear. Thomas was not there. Judas was gone for good. When Thomas heard that Jesus had visited the ten, he stubbornly refused to believe without physically touching Jesus. It was one

week later, with mercy and enormous graciousness and patience, that the risen Jesus accommodated him, and Thomas then responded: "My Lord and my God".

So, Jesus' followers turned out to be extraordinarily different characters: some brave, some timid, some inclined to believe, some quite skeptical.

Even at Jesus' Ascension to heaven, St. Matthew reports that "when they saw him, they fell down before him, though some hesitated". One might speculate that were it not for Pentecost, they would likely have simply gone their separate ways, and their time with Jesus would have been just a memory. But by the grace of God, they added Matthias to their group. Then the Holy Spirit came as wind and flame, and re-energized them together was an irresistible presence of the power of God.

Looking back to the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we find the apostles working miracles—signs and wonders of mercy. The crowds of people revered them, and thousands upon thousands of people sought to be baptized. The reputation of the apostles had already spread far beyond Jerusalem.

Reading a little further in the Acts of the Apostles, we find the apostles being sent to jail, we find them in conflict with the high priest, we find them taking on opposition, all for the sake of Jesus.

That is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, then and continuing right up to this very day. That is the foundation of our Catholic Church. The merciful risen Jesus lives again in all of his disciples—yesterday, today, and forever.

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