

2nd Sunday of Eastertide (C)

24th April 2022

'Doubt no longer but believe'

Acts 5: *signs and wonders worked ...*

Ps 117: *this day was made by the Lord*

Apoc 1: *I was dead and now I am to live for ever and ever*

Jn 20: 19–31: *Doubt no longer but believe!*

This Second Sunday of Easter also has another name: since about the year 2000 it has also been given the name “Divine Mercy Sunday.” This followed Pope St John Paul II’s canonizing the Polish nun, St Faustina Kowalska, in the millennium Jubilee year. Sr Faustina had a lifetime of visions of Our Lord, but in particular was drawn by Him in the early 1930s to promote a new devotion of the “Divine Mercy.” Although she lived only a few years more, dying at the age of 33, the devotion has a gained widespread following across the Catholic world, with some hundreds of thousands Catholics regularly praying the ‘Divine Mercy’ prayers. The ‘Holy Year of Mercy’ 2016, and the World Youth Day in Kraków also in 2016 also helped spread knowledge and devotion to St Faustina and to our blessed Lord’s divine mercy.

The classic image of Jesus’s ‘divine mercy’ is this one here at the front of the sanctuary. This image was

painted under the direction of St Faustina, and features rays of both red (symbolizing His precious blood) and pale (symbolizing the water) flowing out from His Sacred Heart: these refer to the Eucharist and Baptism, the great foundational sacraments of the Church. All this represents the fountain of mercy from Jesus, His love and tenderness for mankind, and His desire to care for us with forgiveness. Beneath the image is always written the simple prayer, “*Jesus, I trust in You.*” What more basic a prayer can there be, than simply to express our Catholic faith in words of complete trust in Jesus our Saviour? So much of what worries us in life can be crippling if we do not have trust in God to bring all things out well, such that we reach heaven to enjoy God’s eternal happiness. “*Jesus, I trust in You,*” is the prayer at the heart of this Divine Mercy devotion, and it’s a prayer that each of us could easily use, daily, and more than daily! How often could we invite the Lord into our everyday situations of sin, conflict, temptation and doubt with that simple but profound utterance: “*Jesus, I trust in You*”?

The apostles themselves, as we know, and not least in the face of Jesus's death, struggled at times with that trust. The resurrection of Jesus throws all sorts of things into relief, and not least of these is the issue of doubt and faith. Jesus had appeared to the apostles — there was no doubt about His Resurrection ... they had seen Him. And yet, when they tell this to Thomas who'd been out at the time he refuses to believe. Even with all the benefits of his three years with Jesus — hearing all His teaching, seeing His miracles and the love and compassion to everyone He met — yet still Thomas was not at all ready for the resurrection. Jesus had told the apostles several times that He must suffer and die but would rise again, and yet they hadn't understood ... not surprisingly, since it had never happened before. But when it did happen, Thomas could have had full confidence in the message of the other apostles, who were filled with the joy and spirit of Jesus, and confident in the truth of His message and of His divinity, affirmed by His rising from the dead. Yet he clung stubbornly to his refusal to believe. And yet in his

doubt, Thomas was quite wrong — hence, when He does finally see the risen Jesus before him, his doubt turns to the most ardent faith, and falling at Jesus's feet he worships Him, *“My Lord and My God” ... Jesus, I trust in You!*

St Thomas is a great saint for us ... because he helps us in our doubts and he duly helps us to trust in Jesus and have faith. We will always have doubts ... it's not a problem; it's part of having faith, and maturing in faith. If we don't ask questions, we won't seek answers, and if we don't seek answers to mature questions of faith, we will still be trying to live with a 10-year-old's faith, which is just not good enough for an adult Christian. Life will always be a mixture of doubt and faith — sometimes we will easily glimpse God moving and working in our life; at other times, especially during times of suffering or sadness, we may find it much harder to see just how God is working.

But, like St Thomas, we must also acknowledge the fact that we can be wrong, sometimes very wrong ... we can be stubborn like Thomas, and refuse to believe the

Church even when she conveys the holy truth to us. But Thomas *is* a saint: he is an example to us because he changed his mind and he acknowledged the truth. He came to see that what the apostles had spoken to Him was indeed right and good. We too need to have this Easter faith and trust — that the Risen Jesus has bestowed on the Church His life-giving and truth-giving Spirit, and this is what animates the Church. The Church is not just an assemblage of followers of Jesus — but the God-willed custodian of the mind of Christ on earth. She is the bearer of the truth ... and is guided in all matters of faith and morals by the infallible Holy Spirit. We can afford to believe her — we should, and we must obey her ... because if we refuse to believe, we are likely to be very very wrong. If we do believe, then we are led to the risen Jesus, “*My Lord and my God.*” Happy and blessed and on the truest path to heaven are we even though we have not seen, and yet — on the strength of the apostles of Christ and the Church through all the ages — we yet believe.

Let us not fail to notice in the heart of the Gospel

account today, that when Our Lord appears to the apostles it is *reconciliation* — mercy, the forgiveness of sins — that is at the heart of His communication to them: both His mercy towards them, and the mercy that they are to carry in to the world. What is it that Jesus first says to them? It isn't criticism or scolding — “Where were you when I was hanging on the Cross?” ... “Where did you all disappear to?” ... “Why did you fail to believe the first witnesses of the resurrection?” No, His first words cut through all that; they are words of reconciliation and forgiveness of them: “*Peace be with you!*” Twice He says it, an immediate and unconditional forgiveness: they are reconciled, and then made ready to convey that mercy to the world: “*Receive the Holy Spirit: for those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven.*” How closely interwoven are these themes of trusting Jesus, trusting the message of His holy Church, and accepting, and ministering, His mercy!

And so: how beautiful and fitting it is that Our Lord sought, by the actions of St Faustina and Pope St John Paul II, the institution of Divine Mercy Sunday on this octave

day of Easter. Having experienced the wonderful passage from Good Friday to Easter — from death to life, from sin to holiness — that the Easter celebration entailed last weekend, and having enjoyed these octave days of resurrection, this Sunday is a chance to say ‘yes’ to those transforming effects of Jesus’s forgiveness having a permanent place in our lives. Let us trust Him deeply to bring His resurrection grace and glorious new life to us, by our accepting the need for His perennial mercy. As Thomas knelt at Jesus’ feet, and knew He would find there a remedy for his mistakes and a healing of his doubts, so we too can kneel calmly and trustingly at Jesus’s feet this Divine Mercy Sunday and know we are saved, we can be forgiven, we have a guaranteed passage through life to eternity. *My Lord and my God ... Jesus, I trust in You!*