

Today we are celebrating the Second Sunday of Easter, which is called Divine Mercy Sunday. Back in the year 2000, Saint John Paul II instituted the Feast of Divine Mercy to be held on the first Sunday after Easter because it was on that day that Christ appeared to the Apostles and granted them the power to forgive sins.

As Saint John Paul II noted, “Before speaking these words, Jesus shows His hands and His side. He points, that is to the wounds of the Passion, especially the wound in His heart, the source from which flows the great wave of mercy poured out on humanity.”

As well, Saint John Paul II was responding to a request Jesus made in the 1930s to a humble Polish nun, Sister Faustina, who later was canonized a saint on April 30, 2000. Jesus asked Sister Faustina to spread the message of God’s mercy throughout the world, and He asked that a special day be set aside to be known as the Feast of Divine Mercy.

Our Gospel reading today focuses on the strength of God’s Divine Mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or Confession. Today’s Gospel is often cited as the Scriptural foundation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Church’s authority to forgive sins through the ministry of her priests. When Jesus breathed on the Apostles, He said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Jesus gives His first Catholic Bishops the power to forgive sins in His name. Jesus is sending the Apostles out to forgive sins and to be a sign of the *Peace of Christ* to all people. Jesus Instituted the Sacrament of Reconciliation in which a person has a personal encounter with Christ for the forgiveness of all his or her sins and the renewal of their soul as it was at Baptism, pure and without sin. One of the greatest effects of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is that the Catholic Church, through its priests, was given the power to forgive sins.

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Jesus announces to us, through the Church and its priests, that our sins are forgiven and we are deeply loved by

God. The Church recognizes that, while Jesus alone pardons our sins, He chooses to work through the words of absolution which the priest speaks in His name. The priest does not absolve our sins in his own name, but “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

After we have confessed our sins, we hear the voice of Christ, through the priest, saying to us, “Go in peace, your sins are forgiven.” This is what Jesus *does*. This is His Divine Mercy, His gift of reconciliation to us.

Why does Christ institute the Sacrament of Reconciliation? After His Resurrection, Jesus knew that even after our Baptism we would still have to deal with the reality of sin. So, out of His great love for us, Jesus Instituted this Sacrament whereby a sinner who is sorry for the sins committed receives pardon and peace and is restored to the fullness of grace with God.

*What is sin? Sin is not just the breaking of a rule or a law, but it is the betrayal of our relationship with Almighty God.* The Church provides for us a clear notion of sin. It defines sin as a deliberate turning away from God’s goodness. Sin begins as an attitude of the mind, heart, and will. How one thinks, feels, and chooses can turn a person away from God. At the core of sinfulness is the value one places on self in relationship to God and other people. Sin is also a spiritual death. Since God is love and only wills what is ultimately good for us, sin is a rejection of God’s love.

Each one of us has been made in the image and likeness of God. Sin distorts our image when we sin. It leads to division, conflict and pain within ourselves and within the community. These are the characteristics of life apart from God. On the other hand, whatever is good and leads to God is holy.

Sin not only separates us from our relationship with God, but it also separates us from our relationship with other people and the Church. When we sin, we sin against God and against those in our family and in our community. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Jesus, who is the One mediator (1Timothy 2:5), reconciles us to “God and the human race.”

In some ways, it is really hard to commit sin, because sin involves making a conscious and deliberate decision to turn away from God’s love and God’s

goodness. On the other hand, we do not commit a sin when we have simply made an honest mistake. Sometimes we can quite easily sin, especially when we have let bad habits such as gossiping, lying, stealing, cheating, spousal abuse, anger, drug abuse or pornography become part of our behaviour.

We can ask the Holy Spirit to probe us and help us see the hardness of sins within us. It may manifest itself in anger or bitterness. Perhaps envy or a critical tongue give us away. It may be thinking we are better than others. Whatever the sins, they all point to one central reality: opposition to Jesus and His Gospel. God wants us to recognize our opposition to Him so that through repentance we can return to Him and know freedom.

That is why the Church offers the Sacrament of Reconciliation. God wants to show us our sins, not to condemn us, but to give us new life and freedom. The freedom we can experience when we confess our sins enables us to walk more closely with Our Lord again.

If you ask yourself, "Why should I go to Confession?," the answer is this, that Jesus is waiting to give you a very generous gift, the gift of His Divine Mercy, His love, His forgiveness and His peace. You couldn't want more than that. His gift is there for the asking. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the words of absolution recited over you by the priest will forgive you of all your sins, giving you renewed inner joy and peace. Jesus' Divine Mercy, the same mercy He spoke of with St. Faustina, can set you free in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Let us not miss out on any opportunity to receive our Lord's Divine Mercy and experience a closer relationship with Him once again.

I would like to close with a story: One day a teenage daughter comes to her father and says, "Hey Dad, what do you think? Can a person go through their whole life without committing any sins?" Her Dad answers, "*No, honey, I'm sorry, but that's just not possible.*" She continues, "What about a year, Dad? Can a person go a whole year without sinning?" "*No, I don't think that's possible either.*" "What about a day, can a person go a day without sinning once?" "*It's very unlikely. No, I don't think they can.*" "What about one moment, Dad, can a

person go one moment without sinning?” “Yes, *that is possible.*” “Well then, Dad, I want to live my whole life, *moment by moment.*”

And that’s how we too should live our whole lives, *moment by moment*, making decisions not to sin and to *always* be in a loving relationship with our merciful God and with one another.