

2nd Sunday of Easter [B] 2024, Divine Mercy Sunday (Lial. Cathedral)

Today is Divine Mercy Sunday, and I shall get to that in just a minute or so. But I need to make a comment about today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles. It paints a pretty idyllic picture of the early Church, doesn't it? "The community of believers was of one heart and one mind; no one claimed any of his possessions as his own... there was no needy person among them..." then the real kicker: "those who owned property or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds to the apostles, who would distribute them to anyone in need." I loved this passage when I was a pastor—the perfect reading to segue into a plea for money. At Holy Trinity, I loved to say, "now if any of you feel so moved this morning, that you would like to donate a farm to the parish, I will be happy to meet with you after Mass!"

Now to an actual homily... Healing plays a huge role in our society. Just look at the commercials during the evening network news—about 75% of them are about health care or medications. (You can tell who the viewers are at 6:30 p.m.—not Millennials or Gen-Xers, but old people like me and many of you in front of me!) Without getting into the health care providers, insurance providers, and the government role in all this, it is indisputable that we spend billions of dollars every year on health care, and long before anyone ever heard of COVID.

But like our physical health, our *spiritual* health also needs attention. Throughout the Gospels, especially in Mark whom we hear for most of this year, **healing** is one of the major characteristics of Jesus' ministry. Some healings are described in great detail, like Jesus spitting in the dirt, making clay and putting it on a blind man's eyes. Other miracles are simply noted, fairly matter-of-factly. But all these healings are signs of the Kingdom

of God. There were indeed physical healings, but almost always there was simultaneously a *spiritual healing* as well.

2000 years ago, in a very insignificant part of our planet, God burst in to this world, in Jesus, in a new and dynamic way, fulfilling his promises and even at times turning the laws of nature upside down.

This morning we hear this ministry of spiritual healing being passed to the Eleven, through the gift of the Holy Spirit. This Gospel passage is the scriptural basis for the sacrament of reconciliation. John tells us that Jesus appears to him and nine others, as they hid in the upper room, scared out of their minds that what had happened to their Master might soon happen to them if they were discovered. Imagine the literally stale air and oppressive smell in a blisteringly hot room barred and closed from the world for days. But Jesus suddenly appears among them like a fresh breeze filling the house, displacing that stale air of fear, gently blowing away the dust of disappointment and propelling the disciples to forgiveness and healing.

In this moment of encounter and empowerment, the Apostles are given a holy responsibility to share God's healing and forgiveness with others. They are now *carriers of God's promises*, and have the power to heal physically and spiritually in Jesus' name. What they say about the risen Christ is not fantasy or delusion. They witnessed his death, and now they bear witness to his risen glory, becoming instruments of the very mercy and forgiveness that Jesus so abundantly and generously bestows on all who follow him.

John then shows how Thomas receives this life-changing mercy. Thomas finds it hard to believe what the other disciples tell him, and so Jesus literally stands before him and shows him his wounds; he then gently takes the reluctant apostle from doubt to faith. Using Thomas's own words, Jesus coaxes one of the all-time great declarations of faith out of him: *My Lord and my God*.

(Bishop Thomas' Episcopal motto!) My Lord and my God! In that moment, Thomas is both healed and changed—healed of his grief and pain, changed from doubt to belief.

The need for that mercy and healing is just as great today as it was in the first century. Perhaps that is why in the Jubilee Year of 2000, Pope John Paul II declared this first Sunday after Easter to be Divine Mercy Sunday. At the heart of our faith is the recognition that we need the risen Christ; we need his healing and above all his steadfast mercy. Without these we are lost, still in our sins—unable to be reconciled with God.

And this is why Pope Francis, early on his pontificate established the extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. At the conclusion of that year, when he closed and sealed the Holy Doors, the Holy Father said this: “Mercy cannot be a mere parenthesis in the life of the Church; it constitutes her very existence, through which the profound truths of the Gospel are made manifest and tangible. Everything is revealed in mercy; everything is resolved in the merciful love of the Father.”

As we continue to celebrate the Resurrection in this joyous season of Easter, let us each open our hearts to that mercy and healing which came to Thomas, and then commit ourselves to be **channels** of that healing in our words and actions for a world so desperately in need of healing and mercy.