

Some words for Divine Mercy Sunday The Second Sunday of Easter

*This day was made by the Lord;
we rejoice and are glad.¹*

Readings:

Acts 2:42-4

Psalm 117:2-4.13-15.22-24. R. v.1

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 5:1-6

Dear Parishioners of St Joseph's & St Charles,

In Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose*, the blind murderous monk Jorge of Burgos opines that with the revelation of Jesus Christ knowledge has reached its limit. Everything that can be known is already known; there is no need to seek new knowledge. Repetition is all that is left to us for, '*there is no progress in the history of knowledge merely a continuous and sublime recapitulation.*'² We might, at least liturgically, be tempted to agree with this point of view today. After all, today is the final day of the Easter Octave – the eighth day of celebrating one day – and so we might legitimately ask, are we not simply repeating ourselves? Have we not said everything that needs to be said already? Can't we move on?

The truth is that the Church, in part, never moves on. We are always stood at the foot of the Cross and by the empty tomb, witnesses to the continuous unfolding of God's redeeming love. We repeat and recapitulate endlessly; it is what we Christians do, it is our tradition. We hand on that which we have received, so that others '*may have life through his name.*'³ After all, even '*Were the whole Realm of Nature mine,*'⁴ the Paschal mystery of the Lord's Death and Resurrection, that '*Love so amazing, so divine,*'⁵ would still prove infinite and unbounded. We are never going to get to the bottom of it nor fully understand it, what else is there to do save repeat what we believe we know by faith?

Yet, as we find in today's gospel, we are also, paradoxically, no longer standing by the empty tomb merely repeating ourselves for, by '*the evening of that same day, the first day of the week,*'⁶ the Church had already begun to move on. It is true that the Church had not got far, only to a room '*with the doors closed ... for fear of the Jews.*'⁷ (how many are locked away at present, fearful of others?) but it was about to experience the power of the Risen Lord and the Holy Spirit and be forever

compelled to go out to the whole world and preach the Good News, *'For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained.'*⁸

The Lord's Resurrection saw what St Paul calls *perishable, contemptible* flesh raised to be *glorious and imperishable*,⁹ for the Lord's human body was not returned to ordinary mortal life as we know it but to a new glorified existence; it now *'embodies the spirit.'*¹⁰ However, as St Thomas discovered, although *of the spirit* this resurrection in glory can still be grasped in the physical universe of the senses, *'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.'*¹¹

St Peter, who witnessed the glorified and embodied spirit of *'My Lord and my God,'*¹² henceforth felt empowered to preach, *'Blessed be God the Father ... by raising Jesus Christ from the dead ... we have a sure hope and the promise of an inheritance that can never be spoilt or soiled and never fade away, because it is being kept for you in the heavens.'*¹³

Recognising that his Lord had risen for us all, he invites us to look forward in faith and to be joyful even when, possibly for a time, *'we are plagued by all sorts of trials,'*¹⁴ to our own hope of future glory, the salvation of our souls. Echoing the words of his Master who proclaimed, *'Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe,'*¹⁵ St Peter reassures us and confirms us in our faith when he says, *'You did not see him, yet you love him; and still without seeing him, you are already filled with a joy so glorious that it cannot be described.'*¹⁶

Our looking to the future is not of course the only thing we are called on to do for, *'The whole community remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.'*¹⁷ It is true that the breaking of bread and coming together to undertake some common endeavour, be it meetings or events, catechesis or community outreach, is circumscribed or even denied to us at present but the community of faith is not broken. Our waiting in joyful hope for future glory should always and everywhere see us use our goods and possessions *'gladly and generously,'*¹⁸ helping those in need so that, giving praise to God, we may be an example to everyone, *'The Lord is my strength and my song; he was my saviour.'*¹⁹

The verses we have today, describing the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles, are often used by some people to forward a distinct interpretation of the Gospel that completely renounces the concept of personal property. That the early Christians invariably met in private homes, generously offered for the use of the community, is frequently overlooked, for example the businesswoman Lydia had her own house,²⁰ as did Simon the Tanner also.²¹ Income remained private too and St Paul worked a

secular trade as a tentmaker²² to earn his living and pay his expenses, though as an Apostle he did have the right to be supported by the community.²³

Christianity does not impose a collectivised socio-economic or political system and it does not eliminate private ownership either for how could you charitably give something that is not yours to give? The early Christians shared what they had because they were *'of one heart and mind.'* They freely and voluntarily chose to give up what they had to meet the needs of the community of believers. With open hearts and minds they experienced the Risen Lord; visited by *'the tender mercy of our God'*²⁵ they thus showed mercy in return. Although they owned things they lived as though they did not.

This Divine Mercy Sunday sees us recall the healing and sanctifying graces, especially those of Baptism and the Holy Eucharist that flowed from the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The trophies of Christ's Passion, imprinted upon his triumphant glorified body, declare a love undefeated by death. To have power over someone, be it psychological, emotional, economic or physical, puts one in a position to be able to grant mercy; that is, to exercise compassion or forgiveness. No longer gripped by the fear of death and liberated by hope in the love and mercy of God the Christian is to *'Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful,'*²⁶ especially to those most in need of our mercy as we are in need of His. It was their Christian love and mercy, especially for the sick and the needy, the weak and the lowly that so struck the peoples of the ancient world.

*'Peace be with you!'*²⁷ The comfort and luxury of our individualistic, solipsistic modern lives is being challenged anew at present and will give many pause for thought. Our readings today remind us of how small and fragile the first communities of believers were and yet they recalled, *'Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you.'*²⁸ Surrounded by an indifferent world that at various times was also hostile, the early Church was, for the most part, intimate in its number and knowledge of each other; formed by faith and hope they were sustained by love and mercy. I wonder, looking ahead, is this how we are to renew ourselves again? What is certain is that it is not by our own power but by the grace and spirit of Him alone, for *'glory be to him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.'*²⁹ Now this indeed might truly be called sublime recapitulation.

*Eternal God,
in whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible,
look kindly upon us and increase Your mercy in us,
that in difficult moments we might not despair nor become despondent,
but with great confidence submit ourselves to Your holy will,
which is Love and Mercy itself.*³⁰

Our Lady of Walsingham, *pray for us.*

St Joseph, *pray for us.*

St Charles Borromeo, *pray for us.*

With my prayers,

Rev. Mark McManus

Parish Priest

19 April 2020

1. *Psalm 117:24*

2. *The Name of the Rose*, Umberto Eco,

3. *John 20:31*

4. *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, Isaac Watts, 1707

5. *Ibid.*

6. *John 20:19*

7. *Ibid.*

8. *John 20:23*

9. *1 Corinthians 15:42-43*

10. *1 Corinthians 15:44*

11. *John 20:27*

12. *John 20:28*

13. *1 Peter 1:3-4*

14. *1 Peter 1:6*

15. *John 20:29*

16. *1 Peter 1:8*

17. *Acts 2:42*

18. *Acts 2:44*

19. *Psalm 117:15*
20. *Acts 16:40*
21. *Acts 10:6*
22. *Acts 18:3*
23. *1 Corinthians 9*
24. *Acts 4:32*
25. *Luke 1:78*
26. *Luke 6:36*
27. *John 20:20*
28. *John 14:27*
29. *Ephesians 3:20*
30. *Closing Prayer, Chaplet of Divine Mercy*