

## GOSPEL

JOHN 20:19-23, 26-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

## A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

We know that each Sunday we commemorate the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus, but in this period after Easter, Sunday takes on an even more illuminating significance. In the Tradition of the Church, this Sunday, the first after Easter, was called "[*Domenica*] in *albis*". What does this mean? The expression is meant to recall the Rite performed by those who had received Baptism at the Easter Vigil. Each of them would receive a white garment — *alba*, *bianca* — to indicate their new dignity as children of God. This is still done today — infants are offered a small symbolic garment, while adults wear a proper one. In the past, that white garment was worn for a week, until this Sunday, from which the name in *albis deponendis* is derived, which means the Sunday on which the white garment is removed. In this way, when the white garment was removed, the neophytes would begin their new life in Christ and in the Church.

There is something else. In the Jubilee of the Year 2000, Saint John Paul ii established that this Sunday be dedicated to Divine Mercy. Truly, it was a beautiful insight: it was the Holy Spirit who inspired him in this way.

Today's Gospel is the account of the Apparition of the Risen Christ to the disciples gathered in the Upper Room. Saint John writes that after greeting his disciples, Jesus says to them: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you". After saying this, he makes the gesture of breathing on them and adds: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven". This is the meaning of the mercy that is presented on the very day of Jesus' Resurrection as the forgiveness of sins. The Risen Jesus passed on to his Church, as her first task, his own mission of bringing to all the concrete message of forgiveness. This is the first task: to announce forgiveness. This visible sign of his mercy brings with it peace of heart and joy of the renewed encounter with the Lord.

Mercy in the light of Easter enables us to perceive it as a *true form of awareness*. This is important: mercy is a true form of awareness. We know that it is experienced through many forms. Awareness is experienced through the senses, it is experienced through intuition, through reason and even other forms. Well, it can also be experienced in mercy, because mercy opens the *door of the mind* in order to better understand the mystery of God and of our personal existence. Mercy enables us to understand that violence, rancour, vengefulness have no meaning, and the first victim is whoever feels these sentiments, because he deprives himself of his own dignity. Mercy also opens the *door of the heart* and allows one to express closeness especially to those who are lonely and marginalized, because it makes them feel as brothers and sisters, and as children of one Father. It favours recognition of those who need consolation and helps one find the appropriate words so as to give comfort.

Brothers and sisters, mercy warms the heart and makes it sensitive to the needs of brothers and sisters with sharing and participation. Thus, mercy requires everyone to be instruments of justice, reconciliation and peace. Let us never forget that mercy is the keystone in the life of faith, and the concrete form by which we make Jesus' Resurrection visible.

May Mary, Mother of Mercy, help us to believe and joyfully experience all this.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 'Peace be with you' – Jesus offers the disciples peace, in the midst of their fear, their confusion, even their lack of belief. Do you long for peace? When have you truly felt at peace? Do you need to surrender any fears, confusion or doubt to Jesus?
- Pope Francis highlight that the result of the resurrection is – forgiveness of sins. Divine Mercy Sunday is a feast that celebrates the immensity of God's mercy – can you describe what God's mercy has done in your life?
- Thomas' journey from doubt to belief has led many to embrace the truth of the Gospel. Are there parts of my life where I still need to invite in Jesus – and let him more truly be my Lord and my God?

## PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.