



Things to Ponder

Divine Mercy

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By Rev. Msgr. Kevin T. Hart

On the Sunday after Easter we always hear the same Gospel from St. John (John 20:19-31). The disciples are gathered together behind locked doors: on the evening of the Lord's Resurrection. Most likely, this was the very room where they had gathered three nights before to celebrate the Passover with Jesus. But so much had happened. They had so much to be afraid of.

Thinking over the past three days, the Apostles realized how much they had to be ashamed of. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus had pleaded with them three times to keep watch with Him, and each time they fell asleep. At His arrest, they had scattered like birds startled by a gunshot, one of them in such a rush to escape that his cloak snagged on a bush and he had to run away naked. Judas, one of their own, had betrayed Jesus with a kiss. Peter, after protesting that he would willingly die with Jesus, denies that he even knew Him, not just once, but three times. The accounts of the Passion reveal no presence of the Apostles as Jesus bore His Cross; it was a stranger, not one of them, who helped Jesus up the final leg of Calvary. In Mark's version of the Passion, none of them, not even John, was anywhere near the Cross. It was a Pharisee who took charge of the body, not the Apostles. They realized that they were all complicit in a hideous death by not raising a single finger in His defense. To the one who embodied compassion, they had denied their own by their absence.

Worst of all, there were rumors floating about that Jesus was back, that He had risen from the dead. Perhaps the doors were locked not just because of their fear of the Jews, as the Gospel states but because of their fear at what Jesus would do to them, after all that they had failed to do for Him. Imagine how fearful they were when He stood before them, and how utterly shocked at His first words to them: Shalom, peace be with you! All is forgiven, do not be afraid. He repeats His greeting once more to make sure they realize His sincerity, and then breathes on them the Holy Spirit; giving them the power to do for others what He had just done for them: forgive the sins of all, even those who, as they did to Jesus, had harmed or injured them.

What a change in the Apostles as we see them in the Gospel and as we see them in the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, where "with great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." And the change was due to Jesus' mercy and forgiveness.

Where was Thomas? Why wasn't he with all the Apostles? A question to ponder, for the Gospel gives no indication of his whereabouts. Thomas has come down in history as the doubter. The phrase "a doubting Thomas" is due to him: He demanded a concrete sign that Jesus had risen. He demanded to see the marks of the nails, to put his finger into His hands

and to put his hand into His side before he would believe. Jesus met all three of his demands, after which Thomas makes the most profound confession of faith: "My Lord and my God."

Thomas had a nickname, Didymus, which in Greek means "the twin." Who was his twin brother or sister? Perhaps you and I. We surely can sympathize with Thomas' doubting that Jesus had risen from the dead. That same real presence of the risen Jesus in our lives is often something that we doubt. We want proof. We wish, perhaps, that we could have been there to see Jesus Himself. Two thousand years without proof and we still celebrate His presence among us--amazing!

We share with Thomas a particular doubt, the doubt that sometimes we just cannot believe that Jesus will forgive us. At times, some sins from the distant past come back to haunt us. We fear that God will punish us severely for mistakes made in the past that cannot be undone or remedied. If Jesus could forgive the Apostles for their abominable treatment of Jesus, surely that same Jesus can and will forgive us through the power of the keys which He entrusted to them and that they have passed on to all priests.

Sometimes we doubt our ability to forgive someone who has hurt us deeply; although we know that we have to if we are ever going to move on. On this Divine Mercy Sunday we are called to accept His Mercy no matter what we have done, and to pass on that Mercy to others, no matter what they have done to us.

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