

THE SECOND WEEK OF EASTER

DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

- Sunday** **Divine Mercy Sunday**
April 23 **The Mercy of Accepting Newness**
A reflection inspired by a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant
- Mon** **Monday of the Second Week of Easter**
24 **The New Life & its Trials**
A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller
- Tues** **Feast of St. Mark, Evangelist**
25 **Helping One Another Face Fears**
A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller
- Wed** **Wednesday of the Second Week of Easter**
26 **Seeking the Life of God's Kingdom**
A reflection derived from a sermon by St. Augustine of Hippo
- Thurs** **Memorial of St. Rafael Arnaiz Baron, Oblate OSCO**
27 **Seeking God Above All Else**
A reflection developed from newspaper articles
- Fri** **Friday of the Second Week of Easter**
28 **Bearing Afflictions with Christ Risen**
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A passage taken from St. Catherine of Siena's Treatise on Divine Providence
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THE MERCY OF ACCEPTING NEWNESS

A reflection inspired by a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant

The Gospel at this Sunday's Eucharist presents two appearances, as they're called, of the Risen Jesus. The first takes place on the evening of Easter Sunday and the second a week later, this Sunday. Recall what the disciples expected when Jesus told them he would die and rise again after three days. The standard hope in the Messiah was that he would impose justice, give Israel glory, and that life would go on as usual but in the way God originally intended. God's power would force all to conform. But it hadn't happened. What Jesus had to prove was that he was Israel's Messiah in spite of being really different, even in his body, from what had been expected.

Recently, this Sunday has been called "Divine Mercy Sunday" because Jesus went out of his way to help Thomas give up his refusal to "believe". What had he refused to believe? Listen to what he confessed: "My Lord and my God!" That wasn't the Messiah Israel had expected any more than the Lord's risen body was anything Israel had looked forward to. God's mercy is actually that he is leading us to something entirely unexpected that we don't know how to visualize or make sense of. God's idea of "resurrection" is wholly other than the then standard one. We see what people expected from the Sadducees' tale of the 7 brothers who all married the same woman. They would have her as wife in the "resurrection". Wasn't that nonsense!? But, as Jesus said, they misunderstood, as did the apostles and the disciples of Jesus in general. Do you?

What we see in this Sunday's Gospel is God's reconciling power leading others, and ourselves as well, to accept what none of us can understand. We have a future we can't visualize or prepare for in any ordinary way. The thing that amazes everyone is that in spite of this Jesus has sent us to be agents of reconciliation for the entire world's population. It means that we stop thinking our future will be lived out according to any rules we could now live by. So we have to stop thinking of life as we have, and most of our attitudes and emotions become obsolete and meaningless. We have to be reconciled to this, and help others be reconciled as well. The first newness is that love like that of Jesus becomes the foundation of all we think and feel and do. We help others be reconciled to this by showing them it is a life of joy and freedom and human-divine creativity. We are to be artists of a "new world", literally. Can you accept that practically? Only divine mercy enables you to do it. And mercy is yours for the accepting.

THE NEW LIFE & ITS TRIALS

A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

At our Sunday Eucharist this week we heard a reading from the First Letter of Peter. Many scholars think the letter was composed using the ritual for baptism as an outline and that the Sunday reading is from the hymn sung at the rite. That's why it reminds each of those baptized into Christ that they are to live in an almost wholly new way and that it will involve many trials and difficulties.

This would also explain why the reading from the Acts of the Apostles was chosen. It details some of the trials the first Jerusalem community experienced when they tried to make loving one another as Jesus had loved them the guiding principle of all they did. Everything was to be based on sharing freely with each other and nothing was to depend on special position or prestige. But not all could accept that new way of thinking and acting—as illustrated by the efforts of Ananias and Sapphira to gain special public esteem by pretense.

Giving oneself to Christ, and so to the Heavenly Father, without reserve means making one's relation to God the foundation and shaper of all one does. But there are, as we say, so many "old messages" in our heads and hearts and they keep shaping attitudes and actions in spite of our best intentions. Have you personally tried to "have everything in common" and reserve nothing for yourself? Ask monks if you want to find out how difficult that is in practice. Find out how much of your self-esteem has depended on being treated as different, and so special, because of something only you can do or do really well. Will others show you love and respect without considering such matters? How will you feel affirmed? These are just some of the trials.

When Jesus appeared to Thomas he did something special for him. Blessed are those who have believed without being treated specially! Do we really feel blessed because we haven't "needed" what Thomas did? Well, do we go out of our way to specially greet or show affection or friendship to others without their having done anything special to deserve it? That is what the first Christians tried to do, and monks have tried to do it in every age since, and all always find it difficult—but not impossible. So today the Lord calls us to keep trying and never give up. It's not something only for monks but for all Christians. We have all died to the old ways and are all being reborn to a new way of life. Its theme song is, "Love one another as Jesus loves you, and all of us".

HELPING ONE ANOTHER FACE FEARS

A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

Mark, the evangelist, was a companion of Paul and Barnabas at the beginning of their first missionary journey. He found it too difficult and scary, and went home. Paul was so angry that when Mark wanted to join the team for a second journey Paul wouldn't hear of it. Barnabas was set on including him. So the two separated. Paul went one way and Barnabas took Mark and went another. He became a successful missionary, the first to write up the Gospel—supposedly as preached by Peter, and the founder of the Christian community in Alexandria, Egypt. Whatever the fear that drove him away from missionary work at first, he faced it and overcame it, partly with Barnabas' help.

The Gospel according to Mark is especially famous for two facts. The first is its emphasis on Jesus' insistence that those who believe him to be the Messiah Israel had long expected must not present him to others in that way, his Messiahship is to be kept secret. The second fact is that Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to his disciples are not narrated except by an angel's announcement to the women who had come to anoint his body early on Sunday morning. The next section of this Gospel, which tells of appearances, seems not to be original. It was added, scholars speculate, because they did like that the last line of the original text runs, "they said nothing to anyone since they were afraid".

The women at the empty tomb were commanded by an angel to tell the other disciples what they had seen. That is the task of missionaries too. A person who is as scared as those women were by the task of carrying the message to people who didn't want to hear it, turns out to be the very one to first write down the Good News and publish it so that everyone could hear it. Then he went on to found a church as famous and influential as any founded by his former colleague, Paul. He didn't let fear imprison him permanently.

The person who helped Mark seems to have been the same person who first persuaded Paul to undertake the mission of evangelizing, Barnabas. The encouragement he gave to others was crucial to spreading the Gospel and founding key Christian congregations. We all have fears to face and we all need encouragement. It is the Lord's grace which inspires both those who encourage others, and inspires the work those others subsequently do for the Lord. We are called to share the news of Jesus' resurrections and encourage others to do it. Trust that this grace can accomplish great things through you.

SEEKING THE LIFE OF GOD'S KINGDOM

A reflection derived from a sermon by St. Augustine

I speak to all who have been reborn in baptism and so are made a gift of the Heavenly Father to the world. All who stand fast in the Lord Jesus and his gift of faith are a holy seed and fruit of Christ's resurrection. The words of the Apostle Paul are: "*Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh and its desires*". We are called to be clothed with the risen life of Jesus. "*You have all been clothed with Christ by your baptism in Him.*" A new way of life begins in the baptismal sacrament. It is forgiveness of all past sins and a gift of that new way of life which is proper to those risen from the dead. This is why we are told that we are buried with Christ by baptism and have undergone a kind of death.

We rise from the dead, as Christ has risen, by walking in a newness of life even as he does. We walk by faith for we are still on pilgrimage. We must let our faith yield the hope that Jesus will bring all to completion and give us the full attainment of what we now experience only in imperfectly in ourselves. Although our hope of resurrection is not fully realized it is sure and certain because we have received the sacrament of it and we experience the pledge that is the Spirit living within us.

We experience this in the way we seek to live the life which we talk about as being from "above", where we think the Kingdom of God is fully realized. "*If you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.*" The key to doing this is "*setting your hearts on heavenly things, not on the things that are on earth*". This means that we begin now to live the life that is fully realized in God's Kingdom.

That life is one of loving God and one another just as Christ does. You are directed to walk in the footsteps of Christ and He is the sure and certain way to the full truth of what God has in store for those who love Him, and love as his Son does. We believe this. We are sure that our hope will be fulfilled. If we now have to do things that go against the ways of this present world that need not make us uncomfortable or afraid. We have only to trust in our Lord.

He trusted and was raised from the dead into the fullness of the life he had entrusted to the Heaven Father on the cross. Even if you have to bear a cross you needn't be afraid. God cares for you and leads you. Live in the joy that comes of that knowledge.

SEEKING GOD ABOVE ALL ELSE

A reflection developed from newspaper articles

Rafael Arnaiz had many abilities and his family was able to support him in developing them in order to find a career. He had an artistic bent and studied both painting and music but settled on architecture as his profession and relegated art and music to the status of hobbies. But he also knew deep faith commitments among members of his family and that led him to participate in religious organizations as a student. From this emerged a powerful, never fading thirst to be in the presence of God. This became the fundamental meaning and direction of his life. It drew him to the Trappist monastery of Duenas.

The quest for God often encounters obstacles and in Rafael's case this was very severe diabetes. In his time (1911 to 1938) and place where there was no really effective treatment and periodically he had life threatening attacks. A diabetic coma took his life at 27.

One extraordinary fact about Rafael was his unconditional dedication to prayer and the quest to draw close to God. Although judged unable to lead the Trappist monastic life, he did not give up. He spent the time between diabetic attacks in the monastery. He was treated as an oblate and participated in the community's life and work as much as possible for one in his medical condition. He died in the monastery infirmary.

Rafael had a deep love for his mother and shared many things about his inner life with her. After his death she edited the letters and essays he had written to or for her dealing with his search for God. It became a best seller and exercised a powerful influence on young people in Spain, beginning during the middle years of the 20th century. This brought him to the attention of the Spanish Church and led to the introduction of a cause for his beatification. St. Pope John Paul II beatified him in 1992.

He was a witness, first, to the supreme and life-giving importance of seeking God with all one's heart, in prayer and service and self-denial, and, second, to the fact that nothing can separate those who seek God from God's love. His witness was very convincing to young people. He showed that faith is the most effective help to making a positive contribution to the human community as well as to the community of Christian believers. He did this in a way which showed how important monastic life can be in supporting the faith life of every Christian, especially the young.

BEARING AFFLICTIONS WITH CHRIST RISEN

A reflection taken from St. Ambrose Commentary on the Psalms

“In time of affliction my comfort lies in this, that your word gives me life.” (Psalm 118) The hope God’s promises arouses in me brings me comfort, enabling me to bear misfortune and face the future with confidence. We read in the Letter to the Romans: *“What can come between us and the love of Christ? Can trouble or worry, persecution or hunger or danger or violence?”* Paul goes on to explain how it is possible to endure all such trials with patience. It is because *“we triumph by the power of the one who loves us”*.

Whether you are wasted by disease or have your house burglarized or your property is confiscated you are buoyed up by hope. As long as you can say to yourself, *“I don’t think these sufferings are even worth comparison with the wonderful life that is coming”* you can handle difficulties. It seems that difficult times are also those of temptation. It is a trial to feel yourself in the hands of a tempter as a hostile power. But God’s promise puts new life into us and sustains and guides us. As spiritual beings there is no other source of life for us. God’s word grows more important in us in the measure we assimilate its meaning; as this happens we grow inwardly. Likewise when we cease to find consolation in the promises of God we begin to lose the life we had, so to speak. The word of God is life and our life-breath is grace.

We have received the most wonderful of all promises in Christ’s resurrection. Everything else takes second place by comparison. This is our treasure and what we need to do is treasure it up, store it up in our minds and hearts and allow it to shape all our concerns, attitudes and undertakings. If we do that our actions will be drawn into harmony with what we learn from the Scriptures; our lives will be in harmony with those of the holy persons God has given us as examples. This is how we are enabled to testify each day: *“Your word gives us life!”*

The Lord has given us parables to teach us how to see parallels to the working of grace in ordinary, daily occurrences and tasks. If we carry these stories in our minds and hearts we will find reasons for hope in very ordinary things. Gradually we learn to see God’s guiding hand in what we are doing and experiencing. This nourishes our hope and reminds us that what God had accomplished in raising Christ from the dead is now being accomplished in us and in those around us. We find not only hope but joy and grace flowing from this knowledge. Keep Scripture’s teachings in your minds and God’s love and joy will find your hearts.

BECOMING ONE WITH GOD

A reflection from St. Catherine of Siena's Treatise on Divine Providence

The person who is exalted by a very great desire and yearning for the honor of God and the salvation of souls should begin the spiritual life by working at the ordinary virtues for a time. One remains in what I call "the cell of self-knowledge". The point is to know well the goodness of God toward oneself. This knowledge must precede love; only when one has attained love can one strive to follow and be clothed with truth and live in its brilliant light.

There is no way to receive a taste for truth as effective as humble and continuous prayer. This prayer has to be founded on knowledge of self. This kind of prayer unites one with God and teaches one to walk in the footsteps of Christ Crucified and Risen. Desire and affection lead to a union of love and make one another Christ.

It seems that this is what Christ meant when he said: "*To anyone who loves me and keeps my commandment I will show myself, and that person will become one reality with me and I with that person*". We find similar words in various places in Scripture and they show us that it is by love that one becomes another Christ.

I remember having been told by a Handmaid of God that when her mind was exalted and she was lifted up in prayer God showed her the great love he had for her and all his servants: "*Open the eye of your intellect and gaze into me and you will see the beauty I have given rational creatures. Then look at those beauties I have created in them by making them in my image and likeness, and especially in the ones I have clothed in the nuptial garment—the garment of love—and adored with many virtues; by all this they are united with me through love. If you ask who they are I would reply that they are my other selves—for they have denied their own wills, are clothed with my will and united to me as conformed to my will.*" It is, then, the veriest truth that one is united to God by love.