

**THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER
DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY
THE OCTAVE OF EASTER**

- Sun. **Divine Mercy Sunday**
April 28 **HOW MERCY OVERCOMES SIN**
 A reflection from The Life in Christ by Nicolas Cabasilas
- Mon. **Memorial of St. Catherine of Siena**
29 **UNITING ONE'S DYING WITH CHRIST'S**
 A reflection from a letter by St. Catherine of Siena
- Tues. **Tuesday of the 2nd Week of Easter**
30 **SHARING FAITH IN THE RISEN CHRIST**
 A reflection from a sermon by St. Augustine
- Wed. **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
May 1 **Memorial of St. Joseph, the Worker**
 WHAT IS TRUE FREEDOM?
 A reflection taken from Prison Meditations by Fr. Alfred Delp
- Thurs. **Memorial of St. Athanasius**
2 **GOD'S LOVE WORKS THROUGH US**
 A reflection from Three Discourse Against the Arians by St. Athanasius
- Fri. **Feast of SS. Philip & James**
3 **CHRIST MODELS OUR PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITY**
 A reflection developed from the Teaching of the Apostles
- Sat. **Saturday of the 2nd Week of Easter**
4 **WITNESSING THE TRUTH OF THE EASTER MESSAGE**
 A reflection from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII

HOW MERCY OVERCOMES SIN

A reflection from The Life in Christ by Nicolas Cabasilas

How is it that by the death of Christ our enmity toward God was ended? Recall that the sin of Adam & Eve was a refusal to share God's way of life and an attempt to create a life of their own design, better to their liking rather than God's. What a great act of mercy this is on God's part. Christ became one of us and not only accepted death but, because of this love for God's way, he was raised to an everlasting life. He showed us that God's way is one of mercy and love, shown in every sort of practical way.

It was not that God demanded the sacrifice of what we hold dear. If that had been the case then the symbolic offering of possessions, such as lambs and goats, would have been enough. We didn't know what God asked of us and we only saw that in the reality of Christ's living and dying and rising and offering us a share in this. It was in this way that the barrier we had erected between God and ourselves was broken down. In Christ justice and peace and love and mercy flourished; when we are one with Christ, they flourish in us as well. But love and mercy and justice and peace define divine life.

In Christ we accept the offer to share God's own way of life.

Once it was the Law that bound people to God. But law is for slaves and for those who don't belong to the household, as do the Master's children and friends. It is by faith and grace that we belong to God. Grace brings faith and faith brings hope and hope brings confidence in God's choice of us to be his children. That is why the Savior is called the "firstborn" from among the dead. We were all dead to God in our enmity toward God's way. Jesus alone could show us the way of righteousness and holiness and peace with God. He offered himself to the Heavenly Father and with him brings all those who are willing to share in his life and death and burial and so come to share resurrection too. It is resurrection to God's way of life.

Baptism and then chrismation with the pouring out of the Spirit upon us lead us to the holy table and the fulfillment of our oneness with Christ and so with God. By this holy food we are brought into the Kingdom and the fullness of divine life. The gates of the Heavenly Paradise are open only for those who will share divine life and that means those who totally reject the human creation called sin.

I have come, says Jesus our Savior, that all may have life. This life is that which the sacraments minister to us as they lead us into the death and burial and resurrection that is Jesus. We can't enter into this life without coming through the door which is Jesus. We can't have life within us unless we eat his Body and Drink his blood. When we renounce sin and accept God's way of mercy, love, justice and peace we begin to be transformed so that we become like Jesus. How do we know we are like him? We know it by the way we love one another, just as Jesus himself said.

UNITING ONE'S DYING WITH CHRIST'S

A reflection taken from a letter by St. Catherine of Siena

I went to visit a young man condemned to death for a political offense and sought to help him prepare for dying. He received me with a great welcome and made me promise that I would be with him when he placed his head upon the block and was beheaded. I promised. Then on the fatal morning I led him to Mass and confession and he received communion, which he had never done before. His will was submitted to that of God and his only fear was that he would not be strong at the moment of death. But the measureless goodness of God created in him such love and desire for God that he said: "Stay with me and don't abandon me and so all shall be well with me and I will die content." I prayed and said, "O Lord, comfort my sweet brother since he will soon arrive at the Wedding feast bathed in the sweet blood of the Son of God, and blessed with the sweet blood of the Son of God and the sweet name of Jesus which will never more leave his memory." And I told him that I would await him at the place of justice.

His heart then lost all fear and his face changed from sorrow to gladness and he exulted. He said, "Whence comes such grace to me that the sweetness of my soul will await me at the place of justice?" He had come to so much light that he called the place of justice holy and said: "I shall go wholly joyous and strong; it will seem a thousand years until I arrive, thinking that you are awaiting me!" It was enough to break one's heart to hear him speak so of the goodness of God.

I went to the place of justice to wait for him with constant prayer. I prostrated and stretched my neck upon the block. Then I got up and prayed to Mary for light and grace to fill his heart at the moment of death and that I should see him reach his goal. Then my soul became so full that although a multitude of people were there, I couldn't see any human creature for the sweet promise on his behalf I felt was made to me.

Then he came. He was like a gentle lamb. Seeing me he began to smile and wanted me to make the sign of the Cross for him. When he had received the sign I said, "Down! To the Bridal my sweetest brother! For soon you shall be in the life that endures always!" He prostrated himself with great gentleness and I stretched out his neck for him and bowed him down and recalled to him the Blood of the Lamb. His lips made no sound except the name "Jesus!" and then "Catherine". As he said this the stroke fell and I received his head into my hands, closing my eyes filled with the Divine Goodness and saying "Thy will".

I had just received a head into my hands, which to me was of such sweetness as I don't know how to express.

SHARING FAITH IN THE RISEN CHRIST

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine

All of us are well aware that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is the one physician able to bring us eternal healing and salvation. It was in order to accomplish just this that he took upon himself our human weakness. If he hadn't done this our weakness would have remained with us without end. But he had equipped himself with a mortal, human body so that in and through it he could conquer death itself. St Paul tells us that it was human weakness which made it possible for him to be crucified, just as it was divine power that made it possible for him to return to life. He would share all this with us. Listen to St. Paul once again: "*Christ will never die again, and death will never have any further hold upon him*". Yes, you already know this, and you believe it. You also believe in all the consequences that flow from these facts. If we have doubts, we only need to look to the wonders he performed while he lived with us. These miracles were meant not only for those who were healed but for us. He gave gifts which would soon pass away, but as signs of spiritual gifts which will never pass away.

He gave sight to a blind beggar but that man's eyes would shortly be closed in death. He raised Lazarus from the dead, but Lazarus would die again. The bodily cures he wrought were never meant to last forever. Yes, at the end of time, Christ will give our bodies themselves a life that will be everlasting. So why did he do such visible wonders? He did it to build up a faith in much greater wonders that were to come and would not be visible. We have a saying that "seeing is believing". Christ let us see that we might believe, not only that he had power to do so many wonders but that he had power to give us everlasting life.

Some think that because Christ Jesus, Our Lord, seems not to work so many wonders today as he once did, we live in less blest times. Some think that the Church was better off when he was alive among us in the body. But didn't Christ himself say that those who believe without seeing are more blest than those who believe only after seeing?

Think of the apostles and other disciples of Jesus after his resurrection. They were so weak in faith that when they saw the Lord they wouldn't believe unless they also touched him. They couldn't believe even the testimony of their own eyes! They had to handle his body, explored his recent wounds with their fingers. Only after that could one of them confess: "My Lord, and my God!"

Christ had often healed the wounds of others. Now it is by his wounds that people came to believe he had risen and to recognize him. All his disciples bore in their hearts a wound so deep that only such visible signs could enable them to recognize that he was indeed alive. Only then could they bear witness to others that Christ had indeed risen and was alive.

And to whom had this witness come? It has come to us! And won't it come to yet others through our faith? Has that faith taken such deep root in your hearts that you can lead others to share it? What a wonderful faith that is! What we need are not exploring hands or fingers. What we need is a deeply devoted heart! Show your heart's devotion by showing how the grace of the Risen Christ changes lives.

WHAT IS TRUE FREEDOM?

A reflection from Prison Meditations by Fr. Alfred Delp

Joseph was a person on the outskirts, standing in the shadows and silently waiting. He was there when wanted and always ready to help. Joseph is the person in whose life God is constantly intervening. He gets warnings and has visions. Without complaint, Joseph allows his own plans to be set aside. His life is a succession of prophesies and dream-messages, of packing up and moving on, though he is one who dreamed of setting up a quiet household and simply leading a decent home-life and going about his daily affairs. He thought about his business and worshipping God.

But instead of this kind of life, Joseph is condemned a life of wondering what will come next. He is beset with doubts at times, he is sometimes heavy hearted and uneasy in his mind. His entire life gets disrupted and he has to take to the road and make his way through unfriendly country, finding no shelter for those he holds most dear except a miserable stable. He is a person who sets aside all thought of self and shoulders responsibilities for others bravely. He obeys God as he understands God.

We celebrate Joseph's obedience on May Day, because that day has been used by atheistic communism to celebrate working peoples' freedom to take possession of the fruits of their labor, even by violence if necessary. How does this contrast with the message of Saint Joseph, the message of obedience? He is one who serves rather than asserts his right to his own. It never enters his head to question God's commands. He receives an order, he makes all necessary preparations, and is ready when God's call comes. Willing, unquestioning service is the heart of his life. It is his message to us, and his call to us. That is what we learn from God's Word as a call to us and if we choose not to respond as Joseph did then this message is his judgment of us!

How proud and presumptuous and self-sufficient we can be. We confine God within the limits of our obstinacy, or our complacency, or our opportunism, and even our mania for free self-expression. We often give God—and with God everything that is noble and spiritual and holy—only a minimum of recognition in our daily round, perhaps only as much as would flatter our self-esteem or further our self-will. We know how wrong this is because so many have come to abject bondage in our time, dominated by ruthless states that force individuals to give service whether they wish or not. Where is the prayer of St. Paul: Do with me whatever you will! Where is Joseph's quiet and willing readiness to serve God?

The person who asked these questions was in prison for opposing the Nazi. He was killed shortly after writing these lines. Obedience to God, he declares, is the path to genuine freedom to do what is good. Giving one's life to God is the only freedom that brings fullness of life. It is a price worth paying!

GOD'S LOVE WORKS THROUGH US

A reflection taken from Three Discourses Against the Arians by St. Athanasius

When God came among us from Mary for the abolition of sin the Son of God took flesh and became a human being, and in that flesh he suffered for us. He did this in order that we might all believe that the Godhead dwelt in flesh. Being God, He had a body and used this as an instrument for our sakes. On account of this the properties of the flesh are said to be his. So he hungered, thirsted, suffered, was tired and all the rest. On the other hand, the works proper to the Word himself, such as raising the dead, restoring sight to the blind, curing the woman with an issue of blood were done as works of the Godhead but through his body. The Godhead was in the flesh which was God's.

The prophet Isaiah said very appropriately that he "bore" our infirmities, and he himself "bore" our sins so that it might be clear that he was not external to the body. That would leave human beings still subject to death and we were redeemed from our infirmities and filled with righteousness. Thus, when the flesh suffered the Word wasn't external to it. That is why the passion is said to be just as much a human work as a divine work of the Father's love. In the body the Lord did his works. That is why he said, *"If I don't do the works of the Father don't believe in me, but if I do them believe the works even if you don't believe in me. Know that the Father is in me and I am in Him."*

When there was need to free Peter's mother-in-law from a fever, He stretched out a human hand and stopped the fever by divine power. In the case of Lazarus, he spoke in a human voice but as God raised Lazarus from the dead. These things were done because he had a body and not in appearance only but in truth. It was appropriate that in putting on human flesh, the Lord should put on the whole with the affections proper to human nature. The affections of the body were absolutely proper to it and the body was proper to Him so that the affections of the body were too, though without altering in any way the Godhead. To the one to whom the bodily affections were attributed—such as being condemned, being scourged, thirsting and the cross and death—so too were the triumph and the grace. All such affections are ascribed appropriately to the Lord.

As God worked through human flesh when he made it his own when the Son of God became incarnate, so does God, in a different but no less real way, work through us and our flesh. It is really God who sends the Spirit into our hearts and souls to make us his instruments for saving and loving mankind. This is what he does when he divinizes us. God unites what is human to himself that he might save humankind and deification might be certain. He saves human persons by uniting them to himself. Salvation is not something outside us that happens to us. We are saved by being made one with the real and true Godhead. It is this Godhead who came to us in the Son of God and put on our humanity to show us what it will mean for us to put on, by grace, his divinity. God really works through us for salvation as truly as through Christ. This has happened through Christ's incarnation, passion, death and resurrection. The loving deeds that you do today are God's loving deeds done in and through you. Rejoice that this great wonder is done daily in and through you.

CHRIST MODELS OUR PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITY

A reflection from the Teaching of the Apostles

Everyone who learns a craft has to watch a master. One sees how the skills of the craft are exercised. This kind of learning enables one to carry out the work of the craft successfully. One copies the master in one's work and does it in a way the master will approve. But if a person shirks some aspect of the task? Such a one is not a good craftsperson.

Our Lord is the Master of the craft of leading others to God. He has called us to continue that work which he begun. We have our Lord for master and teacher. We must imitate his teaching and way of life as fully as we are able. For instance, He left riches and favor and power and glory and accepted poverty and even parted with Mary, his blessed mother, and with his brethren, and finally with His very life itself. He endured persecution even unto the cross and death.

These things he endured for our sake, that he might redeem those from the bonds of the Old Law and from Gentile worship of idols as well as from all ungodliness. He did this that we might share his inheritance.

If, then, he suffered so for our sake, to redeem us who believe in Him, and if He was not ashamed to do this, why don't we imitate Him in all these things, including his sufferings? He gives endurance. He does it that we may be delivered from the eternal death of fire.

He endured everything for our sake, but we do it also for our own sake. Or has Our Lord any need to prove that we will suffer for Him? Rather it is this alone that he wants; he would prove the love that comes from our faith and our free will. Let's part with our parents and our kinfolk and with all that is in this world, and even with our lives for his sake and for one another's sake.

We must, indeed, pray that we don't fall when we are tempted. If we should be called to martyrdom, we can by God's grace confess when interrogated and when we suffer we can endure it. If we are afflicted, we can rejoice, and if persecuted we needn't grieve. In doing these things, we deliver ourselves from hell and, equally important, we teach those who are young in the faith and those who are still hearers to do the same.

This is the pastoral responsibility God gives to all who follow Christ. To follow Christ is to live for God and one another. The Lord lived and died for us. Can we do less for one another? If we fail in faith towards the Lord, we deny him through infirmity of body. Often, as our Lord said, "*the spirit is willing and ready but the body is weak*". If we fail, we not only destroy ourselves but kill the brethren who see our denial and fall because of it. They will think that they have been made disciples of a defective teaching. But if we lead them to stumble, we will have to render an account for them, as well as for ourselves. We will render it to the Lord on the day of Judgment. If you deny the hope that you have in Our Lord, you have destroyed your life in God. It is our responsibility to one another, as to God, not to do this.

WITNESSING THE TRUTH OF THE EASTER MESSAGE

A reflection taken from talks by St. Pope John XXIII

Christianity is not the that complex system of oppressive rules which some unbelievers try to make it. Christianity is peace, joy, love and a life which is continually renewed, like that mysterious pulse of nature at the beginning of spring. We need to affirm this truth as confidently as the apostles did. You must be convinced of it yourself. It is your greatest treasure and it alone can give meaning and serenity to your daily life. The source of this joy and love is the Risen Christ. The Lord has set us free—free from the slavery of sin. The Lord invites us to become new creatures with Him and look to an eternal joy and love.

The joyful mystery which is Easter has a meaning which affects every single Christian person. It affects us in the innermost sanctuary of our spiritual life. It gives us power to become like the Risen Christ. Easter is for all a mystery of death and life. As the clearly expressed commandment of the Church teaches, all of us are urged at this particular time to purify our conscience by confessing our sins and bathing in the Blood of Jesus. We are called to draw near to the Eucharistic feast and to do it with great faith. We are invited to nourish ourselves with the life-giving flesh of the Lamb of God. This illustrates just how the feast of Easter is an experience of the mystery of death and resurrection for all believers and for each of us personally.

Throughout the entirety of Eastertide, we are to proclaim the joyful truth: “*The Lord is Risen indeed!*” This is true for every member of the Lord’s family. The person who was a sinner is risen indeed. The doubting, the distrustful, the diffident, the timorous, the lukewarm—they are all called to rise again. We are one with those who suffer, have been tried sorely, the poor and the oppressed. We proclaim, as Christ did, good news for the poor and marginalized.

The Lord’s passion and Resurrection show us that there are two lives. There is one in which people barely live. There is one for which all long. Isn’t Jesus—who bore this poor, earthly life for our sake—able to give us the life we long for? Jesus wants us to believe this, to believe in his love for us and in his eagerness to share with us his own riches, as once he chose to share our poverty. It was because we all have to die that he chose to die too. And now he gives life!

We all know this. We know that birth is our beginning and death is our end. This is clear for our human sphere, this earth. Our Lord came from the Heavenly Sphere to ours, from the realm of life to that of death, from the land of bliss to that of toil and sorrow. He came to bring us his gifts and to bear patiently our sufferings. He brings the gifts in secret but bore our wretched lot publicly. He concealed his divinity and appeared in the flesh. He has taught us how to pass from the one sphere to the other. Lift your eyes to the glorious light that streams from God’s holy ones. Think of our remembrance of St. Catherine of Siena. The twenty-third child of humble people transformed into a bride of Christ and champion of the Church and an angle of peace. It was God’s grace in her that did so much. It can do as much through you. Letting God work great things and small through you will reveal all the joy that is Christianity.