

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

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Sunday

THE MERCIFUL LOVE OF JESUS

A reflection from a Commentary on John's Gospel by St. Cyril of Alexandria

Thomas' profession of faith came swiftly, only eight days after he had declared himself unwilling to believe in Christ's resurrection unless he felt the very nail marks in his hands. Jesus came to him with a mercy that removed every possible doubt. Our Lord Jesus Christ miraculously entered the room where his disciples were, even though the doors were closed. This is impossible for an ordinary earthly body so the fact reassured Thomas and the other disciples when he also let his side and the wounds in his flesh be touched and felt.

Thomas had said: *"Unless my hands touch the marks of the nails and I see them, and unless I put my hand into his side, I won't believe!"* Yet, to some extent, all were guilty of disbelief, even after they told Thomas that they had seen the Lord. St. Luke's account says, *"While they stood in amazement, torn between joy and disbelief, Christ said to them: 'Haven't you anything to eat?' and they gave him a piece of broiled fish and part of a honeycomb, which he took and ate before their eyes."* This proved it wasn't only in the mind of Blessed Thomas that disbelieving thought were still lurking.

It was their very astonishment that made them slow to believe. But when it became impossible to disbelieve what they could see with their own eyes, then Blessed Thomas made his profession of faith on behalf of all: *"My Lord and my God!"* Jesus added: *"Because you have seen me, Thomas, you have believed. But blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."* There is wonderful providence behind the Savior's words—for us. They show us once again how much Jesus cares for our salvation. He is good, and as Scripture says, he wants everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth! Nevertheless, the saying may surprise us.

Christ had to be patient with Thomas, as he always is. When Thomas said he wouldn't believe, as when the other disciples too thought they were seeing only a ghost, Jesus showed his patience. It was because of his longing to convince the entire world that he so willingly showed them the marks of the nails and the wound in his side. It was for the sake of all who need such signs as these to support their faith. He wants us to have no possible reason for doubt. So, he even took food though he had not need for it.

When anyone accepts what hasn't been seen and believes on someone else's word, the faith shown honors not only the one who teaches it but the One the teacher proclaims. Thus, faith in Jesus, who has been proclaimed without being shown, is worthy of great praise. Blessed everyone who believes the message of the Holy Apostles. As the Gospel says, they were eyewitnesses and so became ministers of the word. If you want eternal life, if you long for a dwelling place in heaven, then you must listen to these teachers and then go and help others find faith too.

Monday

EASTER HOMILY

Pope Francis (2020)

After the Sabbath the women went to the tomb. Yet even in their difficult situation the women did not want to allow themselves to become paralyzed. They did not give in to gloom, sorrow and regret, they did not morosely close in on themselves, or flee from reality. They were doing something simple, yet extraordinary: preparing at home the spices to anoint the body of Jesus. They did not stop loving, in the darkness of their hearts, they lit a flame of mercy.

Jesus, like a seed buried in the ground, was about to make new life blossom in the world; and the women, by prayer and love, were helping to make that love flower. How many people, in these sad days, have done and are doing what these women did, sowing seeds of hope in the world! With small gestures of care, affection and prayer.

At dawn the women went to the tomb. The angel told them not to be afraid. He is not here! He is risen! They hear the words of life even as they stand before a tomb. And then they meet Jesus, the giver of hope, who confirms the message and tells them once again "Do not be afraid". Do not be afraid, do not yield to fear. This is the message of hope. It is a message addressed to us today. These are the words that God repeats to us every day, every night, this very day.

At Easter we acquire a fundamental right that can never be taken from us: the right to hope. It is a new and living hope that comes from God. It is not mere optimism; it is not a pat on the back or an empty word of encouragement to rise up from our own hearts. So, let us not give in to resignation; let us not place a stone above hope. Jesus' hope is different. He plants in our hearts the conviction that God is able to make everything work unto good because even from the grave he brings life. Yes! Everything!

This is the Easter message, a message of hope. And it contains a second part, the sending forth. "Go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee. The Lord goes before us. It is encouraging to know that he walks ahead of us in life and death, he goes before us to Galilee, that is the place which for him and his disciples evoked the idea of daily life, family and work. Jesus wants to bring hope there, to our everyday life. This is also the point from which we can set out anew, especially when we are experiencing times of trial and crisis.

The women give us hope. They embraced the feet that travelled far to meet us. These are the feet that trampled death and opened the way of hope. Risen Jesus, we turn our backs on death and open our hearts to you, for you are Life itself.

Tuesday

WHAT GOD'S MERCY ASKS OF US

A reflection taken from Jesus Christ by Fr. Karl Adam

The initial, immediate reaction which the appearance of the Risen Christ called forth among the disciples was the new and revolutionary realization that he truly is the Lord! "The Lord is risen indeed and has appeared to Simon!" This is what all cried out to the two disciples when they returned from Emmaus. "It is the Lord!", was what John said when he saw the risen Christ on the shore of the lake. "My Lord and my God", Thomas exclaimed when he saw the marks of the wounds in the risen Christ. "Lord, who are you?", asked Paul as he lay on the road to Damascus.

This word, "Kyrie", "Lord", was faith's initial response to Easter's message. In his sermon at Pentecost Peter declared solemnly, "Therefore, let the entire house of Israel know for certain that God has made that same Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ". According to the usage of the time "Lord" or "Kyrie" means God's self-revelation to the Chosen People in might. If the disciples had seen Jesus more as human before their Easter experiences, and realized his divinity only when it broke through the surface of his humanity in signs and words, afterwards that divinity became the central fact in their belief

In the risen Christ who was in their midst. They were aware of his humanity only in relationship to his divinity.

The experiences of Easter gave an important depth and clarity to the disciples' conception of Christ. The old ideas about the human figure of Jesus were incorporated into and permeated by a new conception of his divinity. For the first time they were intuitively certain that Jesus the human being was, in the depth of his being, their "Lord and God". Because it was their Lord himself who had come to stand before them in human form, their other ideas began to clarify. They realized that his proper place, his homeland, could be nowhere but in Heaven and at the right hand of God the Father.

The Risen One assured them, "I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God". This is why the apostles now joyfully preached the news that God had exalted Jesus to his right hand. Never again will this "seated at the right hand of the Father" be absent from the Christian creed. The natural consequence was that from this risen Lord all life and spirit, all grace and forgiveness, all power and might are to be poured out over all his people. They hear such words from the risen Christ: "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the world" and "Behold, I sent you my Spirit which the Father promised" and "Receive the Holy Spirit, if you forgive anyone's sins they are forgiven; if you retain them, they are retained". These final words call attention to their and our mission. The new life of their risen Lord is our eternal life and that of all who believe and follow Jesus. We are to find way to proclaim this everywhere and convincingly.

Wednesday

EASTER HOMILY

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI (2012)

Easter is the feast of the new creation. Jesus is risen and dies no more. He has opened the door of death to a new life, one that no longer knows illness and death. He has taken humanity up into God himself. A new dimension has opened up for all humanity.

At Easter, on the morning of the first day of the week, God says once again “Let there be light”. The night on the Mount of Olives, the solar eclipse of the passion and death of Jesus, the night of the grave had all passed. Now it is the first day once again, creation beginning anew. Jesus rises from the grave. Life is stronger than death. Good is stronger than evil. Love is stronger than hate. Truth is stronger than lies. The darkness of the previous days is driven away the moment Jesus rises from the grave and himself becomes God’s pure light. But this applies not only to him, not only to the darkness of these days. With his resurrection, light itself is created anew. He draws all of us after him into the new light of the resurrection and conquers all darkness. He is God’s new day, new for all of us.

Through the sacrament of baptism and the profession of faith, the Lord has built a bridge across to us and thus the new day reaches us too. At our baptism Christ took us by the hand. From that day on we are held by him and have walked with him in the light. We have walked into real life.

At Easter, the time of the new creation, The Church presents the mystery of light using a unique and very humble symbol: the new Paschal candle. This is a light that lives from sacrifice. The candle shines in as much as it is burnt up. It gives light, in as much as it gives itself. Thus, the Church most beautifully presents the paschal mystery of Christ, who gives himself and so bestows the great light. We should always remember that the candle is a fire. Fire is the power that shapes the world, the force of transformation. And fire gives warmth. Here too the mystery of Christ is made visible. Christ, the light, the fire, the flame, burns up evil and reshapes both the world and ourselves. “The one who is close to me is close to the fire”, as Jesus is reported by Origen to have said. And this fire is both heat and light: not a cold light, but one through which God’s warmth and goodness reaches down to us.

Let our Easter prayer be that we will experience the joy of the light of Jesus, and let us ask that we become bearers of this light.

Thursday

UNITING OURSELVES WITH CHRIST'S DYING AND RISING

A reflection from Origen's Commentary on the Letter to the Romans

Christ has given his death to us as a call to die to sin and to live for one another. Sin isn't to have free reign in people; it won't if we believe and live the death to sin that Christ shows us. Do you believe you are dead to sin and truly crucified and buried with Christ? This kind of death should be a way of life for those who have faith.

St. Paul says, "If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him". It is important to notice the precise meaning of the phrases Paul uses. He doesn't say "we have lived" as he says "we have died", but he says "we shall live" when Christ is revealed in glory. This is a way of showing that death is at work in the present world and only in the world to come will there will be life in fullness. Christ is our life.

So, "our life is hidden away in God" now and for the time being, while death is still at work. Our life will be revealed when Christ is revealed. But the death which is at work in us has certain decisive moments. As with Christ there was a moment when he cried out with a loud voice and gave up the spirit and there was also a time when he was laid in the grave and its entrance was sealed up, and, finally, there was the moment when the women came to look for him in the tomb but didn't find him because he was already risen. Each of us who believe in Christ must experience this three-fold pattern in our own dying and rising.

First of all, Christ's death must be manifested in us by a verbal acknowledgment of our faith in him, our crying out to God; it is, after all, faith that leads to righteousness in the heart and it is a verbal confession that leads to salvation. In the second place, we die with Christ as we put to death those passions which belong only to earth. It is part of carrying Christ's death about with us wherever we go. It is this kind of death which is to be a work in us. In the third place, we have to proclaim Christ's rising by showing that we have already begun to rise from the dead buy walking in a new way of life.

The first moment of our dying in Christ is when we renounce the world, the second is when we renounce sin and the third is when we are perfected in holy wisdom. But this rising may be seen only by God, as only God saw Christ rise from the dead. Christ chose to empty himself and take on the lot of a slave. He became obedient even to death on a cross. By that dying he destroyed the Lord of death. In doing this he set us free. He bound the strong one and plundered all that the devil had possessed. He carries all he has freed to heaven. We have only to empty ourselves in obedience to God and in love for one another. Becoming like Christ, we then will be taken by our Savior into the joy and fullness of eternal life.

Friday

THE PERIL OF FAILING TO SHARE CHRIST'S LOVE

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Pope Leo the Great

If our hearts don't hesitate to believe what our lips have professed then not only has Christ died and been raised to life for us, but in Christ we too have been crucified, in him we have died and been buried and in him we are being raised up to a new way of life. This last is our third day. St. Paul says, "if you have risen with Christ then seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God; set your hearts on heavenly things and not on the things of earth, for you are dead and our life is hidden with Christ in God."

As people of faith we know for certain that we have the power to raise up our hearts to heavenly things and to devalue desires that are merely worldly. The Lord solemnly guarantees his presence to us in these words, "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of this world". If Christ is with us there is nothing that we cannot do with him. The name "Jesus" means "Savior". He doesn't forsake us by ascending into heaven. From the right hand of the Father Christ strengthens us not only to endure trials as he did but to love others and serve others as he did.

There are many who believe it is very dangerous to fail to celebrate the festival of the resurrection. It is even more dangerous to fail to live the risen life Christ shares with us and gives us the strength to live with all our hearts. We must not act like fools who given themselves over to selfish pleasure seeking or run away from what seems difficult or hard. The earth is full of the Lord's mercy. Christ's victory is available to us everywhere. This gives substance to his promise, "Fear not I have overcome the world". It is always Easter for us as long as we abstain from the old leaven of vice and sin.

If you understand the mystery of God's boundless love and kindness, says St. Paul, and if you realize what the Son of God had done for our salvation, then have among you the same attitude as was Christ's. Even if you are rich you mustn't fear the abasement of loving the poor by giving what you have. If you are of noble birth don't be afraid of doing whatever genuine love requires in dealing with others. Don't consider anything beneath your dignity, for you follow one who took upon himself the condition of a slave for others' sakes. We too must walk in his footsteps. We must learn to devalue whatever would prevent us from loving a brother or sister in need.

Listen again to St. Paul: "Have the same attitude as Christ Jesus. He was God and didn't regard this as something to be clung to; instead, he emptied himself and became like a slave, becoming identical with ourselves as a human being for all to see. In his human body he humbled himself and became obedient even to Name that is above every other name!" This is God's call to each of us. Go and do likewise

Saturday

BEING FILLED WITH CHRIST'S LOVING

A reflection from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny

Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Christ is the firstfruits of those who have died and the firstborn from the dead. His resurrection is the prototype of all others and guarantees our rising. His resurrection has prepared for us a twofold grace. Through living the paschal mystery in our daily lives, we rise from the death of sin, and by our joyful celebrations of his rising we rouse ourselves from the sluggishness of spiritual sleep.

A person is indeed slothful and half-hearted if that person doesn't feel a thrill of joy, a sense of new life and vigor, at the glad cry: The Lord is risen! For myself, when I looked upon the dead Jesus I was overwhelmed by despairing grief. But in the living God, as Scripture calls him, my heart and my flesh could rejoice. It is with no small profit to faith, no slight dividend of joy, that Jesus returns to me from his tomb. I recognize the living God where only a little while ago I could only mourn a dead human being. My heart was filled with sorrow because he had been slain and now that he is risen not only my heart but even my flesh rejoices in the confident hope that I too will rise and be immortal.

I slept and I arose, Christ tells us. Awake then, my sleeping self, and rise from the dead so that Christ may give you light! As the new sun rises from below the horizon, the grace of the resurrection already casts its radiance over the entire world. It is a radiance reflected in the eyes of those who have watched with Christ from before daybreak. This wakefulness ushers in the day of eternity.

This reveals to us the day that will know no evening and whose sun will never set. Only once did that sun that is our Jesus go down, and now once more and once and for all that sun has ascended above not only the earth but the heavens. He has led death captive in his triumphal procession.

This is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad! If you too watch daily at the threshold of the House of Wisdom and keep your eyes fixed on the doorway of that House, then you too, like Magdalen, as she with you keeps vigil at the entrance to his tomb, will find the One she found. You will know that what was written of wisdom was written of Christ: Wisdom hastens to make self-disclosure to all those who desire it wholeheartedly. Those who rise early to seek this wisdom will have no trouble but will find it at the gate. While it was still dark Mary came to watch at the tomb. She found Jesus. She found love. She found love not according to the flesh but in the spirit. Jesus called her to share that love by sharing Him whom she loved. If you too do such watching, see if you don't find yourself singing with Mary: "In the morning fill us with your love; we shall exult and rejoice all our days"! We rejoice by loving one another. We rejoice by showing mercy as it has been shown us. In this love is the fullness of life.