

## Homily - Divine Mercy Sunday 2024

In his infinite love, it is God, as Saint Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians, “who is rich in mercy.”

Pope Saint John Paul II would adopt that line for the Latin title of his 1980 encyclical, *Dives et Misericordia*, in which he reflects on this defining characteristic of God’s love for his people.

In the first chapter, he explains that Jesus Christ himself, as the Son of God and himself a divine person of the Trinity, is the one who perfectly reveals this mercy to the Church.

In fact, he writes, “Not only does He speak of it and explain it by the use of comparisons and parables, but above all He Himself makes it incarnate and personifies it.”

Jesus *is* merciful love at its most perfect.

On this final day of the Easter Octave, which began with our first Easter celebrations of the Lord’s Resurrection, we conclude by taking this opportunity to reflect on this mystery of merciful love - a day which we call Divine Mercy Sunday.

After all, there’s no more perfect sign of the love that Christ has for us than what we have just witnessed and experienced in his Passion, death, and rising from the dead.

All of that was itself an act of love - a sign that Jesus was willing to endure any and every suffering out of his desire to free us from our sins and woundedness.

Of course, it’s one thing to acknowledge that in the abstract, and another thing entirely to really appreciate it on a personal level, much less respond to that gift.

We may not feel like the joy of Easter has really changed us yet in a substantial way, and that there's still work to be done. We may struggle to live that prayer and maxim of Divine Mercy - to pray, "Jesus, I trust in you" - and mean it.

That may be true. And if so, the good news is you're not alone.

Consider this famous Gospel passage of Jesus's Resurrection appearance to St. Thomas and the other disciples.

Let's start with some of the subtle details. When did Jesus appear?

"On the evening of that first day of the week."

Does that sound familiar?

It should, because the first Resurrection appearance to St. Mary Magdalene took place early in the morning, "on the first day of the week."

So, this event is taking place exactly a week later, just as we heard it read from our Gospel exactly one week ago on the morning of Easter.

And what's special about the first day of the week?

It's Sunday. The day on which the Christian community would begin to celebrate the Eucharist, where the Lord would come to be truly and sacramentally present with his Church.

This is the moment Christ chooses to reveal himself again to his disciples and remove the doubts that linger in the hearts of his friends.

And in that encounter, he then sends the Holy Spirit upon them to give them the authority to forgive and retain sins - the same authority exercised today by the Church's ministers in the sacrament of Reconciliation.

These are the places and moments in which we too have the most powerful access to Our Lord's merciful love.

So many of us feel either as though God is distant and far away, not caring about our lives or our struggles - or that if he does care, he is more concerned with his justice, and isn't willing to forgive us for our past failings.

But here in his Church, and most of all in the sacramental life of our Catholic faith, we have the opportunity to encounter him and let him meet us in those moments of doubt or worry, and experience the reality of his mercy.

It's true, it can be difficult to find the space for that encounter. Even some of the greatest Saints of the Church found this to be the case.

The greatest modern promoter of Divine Mercy in the history of the Church itself, Saint Faustina Kowalska, found that even after having experienced authentic visions of Christ and receiving signs of his love, she still struggled to keep from being overwhelmed by her daily responsibilities.

In her diary, she resolved to recommit herself to the same fundamentals of prayer - most of all, in making the time to be with the Lord in his Eucharistic presence.

"I will not allow myself to be so absorbed in the whirlwind of work as to forget about God," she wrote. "I will spend all my free moments at the feet of the Master hidden in the Blessed Sacrament."

And of course, alongside the Eucharist, the other ordinary means by which we receive the Lord's mercy and forgiveness is the one that so many of us benefited from in the Lenten season - the sacrament of Confession.

We should never underestimate the power and value of this forgiveness, which cost so much and yet is so easy for us to receive.

All we have to do is be humble enough to approach it with devotion and trust.

Today, on this beautiful celebration of the Lord's merciful love, let's recommit ourselves to seeking and giving thanks for this mercy, not just on this feast, or even in this Easter season, but every day of our lives.

And as we receive that gift, we have to share it as well - share it through our actions, and especially in the witness of our faith, as we share it with those who are still in need of the healing that Our Lord offers.

As Pope John Paul II would write, "The genuine face of mercy has to be ever revealed anew."

The mission of Divine Mercy is a commitment to working not just for the whole of this life, but for eternity.

And here in the sacrament of the altar, we receive the strength we need to live that commitment in its totality - we receive the love of the Word made flesh, dwelling within us, and are renewed for that fight by the power of his Holy Spirit.

If doubts and fear still linger, do not be afraid - simply ask for the grace to make that simple prayer of his Saints your own:

"Jesus, I trust in you."