



Bible Study Second Sunday of Easter Divine Mercy Sunday Year A

St. Maria Goretti and St.
Peter Claver Parishes

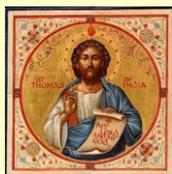
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So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." Jn. 20:19 NABRE

Reading I: Acts 2:42-47

Divine Mercy – From Fear, to Faith and Favor! Fear is not a bad place to start a spiritual journey. Here is why. If we know and understand our fears, we are more likely to overcome them. Unfortunately, many of us fail to confront our fears and use money, sex, power and materialism to hide our deepest fears. Many of us fear being alone, being separated from loved ones, losing a meaningful place in the world, illness, growing old, inadequate resources, substandard healthcare and dying. But if we replace our fear of the unknown with faith in the One who knows all, we will find favor and peace. With love for God, by embracing His divine mercy, and love of neighbor, we can move from fear to faith and find favor with God.

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles as promised. Many were baptized (Acts 2:41) and the disciples ministered to



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those who formed the nucleus of the new Christian Church. After Pentecost, these new Christians were not afraid to worship and make following Christ part of their daily lives. They devoted themselves to preaching, teaching and care for each other. They knew that God was with them and working of God in their midst. Because they imitated God's mercy, they inspired the people of Jerusalem. The miracles worked through the apostles struck "fear" *phobos - φόβος*) in those who witnessed them. The miracles were active signs of God's presence in their community (v. 43). The fellowship among them extended to their willingness to sell their property (i.e. real estate, see 5:37) and personal possessions to help others in need. This demonstrated true Christian love (v. 44-45). They celebrated the Lord's Supper, that is, the Eucharist. This was evidence that God was with them to strengthen them. They moved from fear to faith to favor. DISCUSSION QUESTION: Could you give all you have and share it with others like these early Christians?

FEAR

Fear is a feeling of reverence, awe, and respect, or an unpleasant emotion caused by a sense of danger. Fear may be directed toward God or man, and it may be either healthy or harmful.

A healthy fear is reverence or respect. The Bible teaches that children are to respect their parents (Lev 19:3), wives are to respect their husbands (Eph 5:33), and slaves are to respect their masters (Eph 6:5). The Scriptures also declare that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov 1:7) as well as "the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 16:16).

A harmful fear is a sense of terror or dread. Believers are instructed not to fear human beings (Matt 10:28; Phil 1:28), because they cannot ultimately harm us. Wicked men, however, are constantly fearing other people, especially the righteous (Prov 28:1; Matt 14:5; Rom 13:3-4). Such fear causes them to act deceitfully in an attempt to hide their sins (2 Sam 11; Matt 28:4-15). (From Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

Reading II: 1 Peter 1:3-9

Divine Mercy – From Fear to Faith and Favor! This letter of St. Peter has been accepted as authentic by many scholars. It shows his spiritual evolution from fear; by his denial of Christ (Mt. 26:75); to the faith of his oration after Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36); to his miracles and teachings. He realized that this transformation is only accomplished through God's Mercy, or favor.

His salutation, blessed be the God and Father of mercy," (v. 3) is an expression of praise and thanksgiving to God the Father. It also presumes that his readers accept the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity and the divinity of Christ. St. Peter recognized that his spiritual evolution was a result of the divine mercy of God, who the beginning of time planned for mankind a new life after our time on earth, is complete. It is through God's mercy that He reveals Himself to us. He strengthens us to live in Him, even in difficult times, through the faithful obedience to His commands. It is through God's mercy that we move from fear, to faith and eternal life in His favor. DISCUSSION QUESTION: What are you doing to insure that your faith finds "favor" with God?

Gospel John 20:19-31

Divine Mercy – From Fear to Faith and Favor! It has been said that faith without doubt is dead. But doubt without faith is spiritual death. As Christians, we believe in God the Father Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth. But if we don't have any doubts about God, our faith is dead and we are dishonest with ourselves. Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. Doubts keep us moving on a path to spiritual growth. A companion of doubt is fear. We fear what we don't know or understand. Fear may spark a quest to seek wisdom and understanding. Since all knowledge comes from God, our fear and doubt can lead us directly to God's blessed presence. It is by God's mercy that we move from fear to faith and favor.

The Gospel of St. John gives us a vivid example of the movement from fear to faith to the favor and blessedness of God's presence. John records that the apostles were behind locked doors and described their mental state as *fearful*. Perhaps they feared that they may suffer the same fate as Jesus. Perhaps they feared facing the public without their leader, who suffered so shamefully (v. 19). St. John implied that Jesus appeared miraculously, even though the disciples had *shut up* (*κεκλεισμενον* - **kekleismenon**,) the doors (v. 26). Nothing could stop Jesus' resurrected body that had passed through grave clothes and a rocky tomb. Therefore, He could also pass through the walls of this structure. He stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." (vv. 19-20) He showed them His wounds to remove their fear, which was accompanied by the word "peace". *Fear* and *peace* cannot occupy the same place. Jesus gave them His peace and breathed on them His Holy Spirit. His mercy, grace and favor filled the disciples. He immediately commissioned them to go and show His mercy to others. (vv. 21-23). The use of the Greek verb *breathed on* (*ἐμφυσᾶω*, *emfusaw*) to describe the action of Jesus invokes Gen 2:7 and the image of a new creation created by the breath of God. Through Jesus' mercy, the apostles went from fear, to faith, to favor.

What about St. Thomas? He was not there. What do we miss when we miss the Eucharist? While Thomas may not have been as fearful as the other disciples, as he was not locked in the room, he certainly had a product of fear, which is *doubt* (vv. 24-26). Note that he expressed his doubt honestly. His confession, "My Lord and my God" does in fact confess the faith which he had previously lacked. He received grace and God's favor and blessing even though he had to see to believe. He moved from fear, to faith to favor. **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** What do you fear the most? How do you handle those fears?

PRAY ABOUT IT!

Monday

Read John 20:26-28. Are you like Thomas?

Tuesday

Read Deut. 7:12. What is the blessing of obedience?

Wednesday

Find out about the Chaplet of Divine Mercy.

Thursday

Read Matt. 16:23. How are you a stumbling block to others?

Friday

Read 1 Peter 3:3-9. How is your faith tested by hardship?

FAVOR - GRACE

Favor as used in the Bible: Means generally good will, acceptance, and the benefits flowing from these; in older usage it meant also the countenance, hence, appearance. Alternating in English Versions of the Bible with "grace," it is used chiefly of man, but sometimes also of God (Gen 18:3; 30:27; 39:21; Ex 3:21; 2 Sam 15:25, "in the eyes of Yahweh," etc.). It is used perhaps in the sense of "countenance" in Prov. 31:30, "Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain" (the King James Version), where for "favor" the Revised Version (British and American) has "grace"; the reference is to external appearance. (From International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003, 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Resources: John Neal M. Flanagan, O.S.M. ; *John Collegeville Bible Commentary*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville Minn., p. 1015-1019; *Living Liturgy Spirituality, Celebration, and Catechesis for Sundays and Solemnities Year A 2017*, Joyce Zimmerman, C. PP. S. Kathleen Harmon, S.ND. de N., Christopher W. Canlon, S. M. Liturgical Press Collegeville, Mn. pp. 115-118; Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible, revised edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner. The Sunday Readings Cycle A , Kevin O' Sullivan, O.F.M Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, 153-160;

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