

**Sunday, April 19, 2009
(8:30 AM Mass)**

Divine Mercy Sunday

Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." JN 20:28 – 29

It wasn't too many days ago that we were looking upon Him who had died on the cross. It all had seemed lost. The One we had followed, the One whom in we had put our trust seemed to have just died away on us. But, we know that's not the end of the story because after the third day, the tomb in which Jesus was placed was empty. Because He rose from the dead! The question is – What were the first words Jesus spoke to the disciples after He rose from the dead?

Actually, the first words are important. The first words that Jesus speaks after he rises from the dead are so important that it actually reveals, in the fullest, God. Yes, we get bits and pieces and little glimpses of God all throughout the Old Testament, through the profits and Moses and the Law. But we don't have the fullness of God's revelation until the resurrection of Jesus. Now we've got the fullness. So, whatever he's going to say, whatever those first words are that come out of Jesus' mouth are going to express the fullness of God. What were his words?

As I was thinking about this Gospel and as I listened to the first words out of Jesus' mouth, all I could think of was that it's a good thing that I'm not Jesus. Because I have a bunch. The first words out of my mouth would not have been his words. If I had traveled with my disciples day and night for three years and ate with them, worked with them, performed miracles before them, and then in my need asked them to stay with me... 'Will you not watch with me for an hour while I pray?' They fell asleep. Not only do they fall asleep, but in my hour of need they abandoned me. They are not there. As a matter of fact, two of my leaders deny me and betray me. One with a kiss, the other denied me knowingly - and he is the head of my followers.

If I were Jesus, let me tell you the first words that would have come out of my mouth after the resurrection. "Where the H-E-double-hockey-sticks were you? Where were you? You're going to pay for this. You're going to pay for this big time. And then when you prove to me that you're really grateful, then maybe, maybe we'll talk about it a little bit later on." It's a good thing I'm not Jesus. It's a good thing I'm not. Because that is the fully human response. As a matter of fact, it's the only *human* response.

Whenever we have been betrayed in our humanness, whatever we have been denied, and we all have been...Whenever we have been neglected or hurt in any way, there are only two things we can do. One is to bury it. And whenever we bury it it's always going to pop up in a very ugly way. The other thing we do is revenge. You hurt me, and by George I'm now going to hurt you. That's the history of the world. That's the history of war. And all we need do is read the newspapers of the last three weeks and that's the history of so many who have been hurt. They will get back at their beloved by destroying everything that their beloved loves. How many have been destroyed just in the last three weeks by the killing response of revenge? That's all we've got.

Or, is that all we have? Because the first words out of Jesus' mouth after his resurrection are these: "Shalom! Peace be with You." That's incredible. He doesn't even bring it up. He holds nothing against them. If that is the revelation of God, we have a Teflon God who holds nothing against us. We have been taught all through the Old Testament that if we screw up, God will get us. Jesus is now saying, 'That's not the case. That's not the case. If I am the revelation of God now in the flesh, you who see me...and my response to you is I hold nothing against you. You are set free.' Now, watch what he does. If this isn't most remarkable, most remarkable...He's about to give them marching orders. 'As the father has sent me down from heaven, I have come down from heaven to show you what God is like, I'm now going to send you out to do what I have done.'

But, he's not going to send us out to do what he has done until he gives us the power to do it. So what does Jesus do at this point? He blows on them. He gives them his breath. St. John says, "He breathed on them." What's he giving them? Well the ancients believed that life was in the breath. If there was no breath - there was

no life. So if I am giving you my breath, I am giving you life. What Jesus is now giving to the disciples, and is giving to everybody in this church right now, is an incredible power. Incredible power. He breathed on them and then he says, 'Receive what I have. I am now going to give you my secret – what I have by nature'. "Receive the Holy Spirit".

And let me tell you what this nature can do. 'Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven. You now have the power to do only what God can do. Only what God can do. You now have the power to forgive sins.' And I want you to hear that clearly, that if anybody has offended you or if anybody has past hurt you (and there isn't a person within the sound of my voice who has not been hurt in some way whether consciously or unconsciously on the part of the offender), you have the power to forgive. And then something incredible happens. They are set free – and YOU ARE SET FREE!

You also have another power. You have the power to retain that sin. You have the power to say, 'No, I will not forgive you'. That really is within your power. But I got to warn you, if you use that power to keep them in 'jail', the jail of their offense, the jail of their sin, you've got to guard them. You've got to stay at the door of that sin. And that means you've got to watch them morning, noon and night. And you've got to think about it morning, noon and night. You've got to suck on the offense. You've got to think about the offense. And it's NEVER going to go away. Oh, that's a very EXPENSIVE price to pay. But you don't have to pay it. Why? You've now got the power to forgive.

Now I've heard people say many many times, 'Father, I can't'. I can't tell you how many times in confession I've heard people say to me, 'Father I want to forgive, but the offense is so great, the event is so deep, the sin so severe, I can't.' And my response to you is, 'I know, neither could I'. Because to err is human but to forgive is what? D-I-V-I-N-E. You can't. But it's not just you. It's the **divine in you**. The Christ in you. The risen Christ in you has this incredible power. And he's now asking you to use it. To use it.

In the moment that the whole world learns not to hang onto revenge, what does that do to the history of war? It takes it away. It takes it away. As long as we no longer hold onto anything, but are able to let go and forgive and to give generously, what does that do to the famine and starvation of the world, the sickness and the disease that are brought on by humankind? They are gone. That's the reason that he's sending us forth – TO BE CHRIST IN THE WORLD!

I got to tell you. This is such good news, it's incredible. That's why Thomas didn't believe it. Thomas didn't believe it. Thomas said, 'I don't believe that you've got that power. I don't believe that it's in you. I don't believe that he showed himself to you.' So the next week Jesus comes back, even though the doors are locked he comes to them and says, "Peace be with you. Thomas, come here. Put your finger in my nail marks. Put your hand in my side. Do not persist in your unbelief, but B-E-L-I-E-V-E." And Thomas says, "My Lord and my God". But then Jesus says something for us. 'Thomas, you saw so you believe. That's fine. But if you want my mercy, if you want my power, if you want to do what I do on Earth, if you want to be free, how much more blessed are those who have not seen but dare believe!' Those who walk by faith.

Now these things have been recorded. He had done many many more things, but these things have been recorded in this book so that you might dare, have audacity to believe the good news that I preach to you today. And it is good news. Because if you believe that good news you will have LIFE. And it's all about LIFE.