

Divine Mercy Sunday A

I remember one of the tragic events that took place on October 6, 2006. An armed man entered an Amish schoolhouse in Nickel Mines, in Pennsylvania. He chased out the little boys, and lined up 10 little girls in front of the blackboard. He shot all of them and then killed himself. Five of the girls died. The whole Amish community was in shock. They mourned their beloved children. After a while they walked to the home of the man who killed their children. They told his widow they forgave her husband for what he had done, and they consoled her for the loss of her spouse. They even provided her family with food and other items that they needed. They buried their anger before they buried their children. Amish Christians teach us that mercy and forgiveness is central to our faith. They believe in a real sense that God's forgiveness of themselves depends on their extending forgiveness to other people. That's what the mercy of God is all about.

Today we celebrate the mercy of God. God is justice, but God is also compassion, and God has extended both to us. We must give thanks. We seldom pray for justice but often pray for mercy. Divine mercy is what we celebrate and give thanks for. God's mercy is personified in Jesus. The Church is the Body of Christ and, as the Body of Christ, we must also become mercy personified. Unfortunately, our culture does not hold mercy as a virtue to be practiced. Our culture admires mercy, but it is slow to extend it. Many even see mercy as a weakness.

A man who had not been to confession for a long time finally went to confession and said that he had stolen lumber from his work site for years. For his penance the priest asked him, "Can you make a novena?" The man answered, "Whatever that is, if you have the plans, I have the lumber."

In the year 2000, Our Holy Father Pope John Paul instituted a new feast, the Feast of Divine Mercy to be celebrated on the Second Sunday of Easter. It arises out of a series of apparitions which a Polish nun, Sr. Faustina, received. Sr. Faustina was born in Poland in 1905. When she was 20 years old, she entered the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy where she lived for the next 13 years, until her death on October 5, 1938. She was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1993 and canonized in 2000.

In the first part of the Gospel, we have Jesus giving his disciples the authority to forgive sins and bring God's mercy to all peoples. "Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

In the second part of the Gospel, we have St. Thomas demanding a personal vision of and a physical contact with the risen Jesus as a condition for his belief in his master's resurrection. Just an invitation from Jesus was all that was needed for Thomas to profess his faith saying, "My Lord and my God." That profession of faith took him on a long and dangerous missionary expedition to India in AD 52. His fearless preaching led him to his martyrdom in AD 72. I was very fortunate to visit the place of his martyrdom and celebrate a Mass over his tomb during my last visit to India—my home country. There is a place called St. Thomas Mount where he used to go to pray. He used to pray in a cave before a cross that he had carved out. It was an incredible feeling to be there where St. Thomas walked according to the oral tradition.

Today we are called to be Christ's witnesses like Thomas. It was Pope John XXIII who said, "Consult not your fears but your hopes and your dreams. Think not about your frustrations but your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in but with what it is possible for you to do. Every believer in this world must become a spark of Christ's light." On this Divine Mercy Sunday, we are reminded to be witnesses of God's mercy and forgiveness.

A priest was pulled over for speeding. As the cop was about to write the ticket, the priest said to him, "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*" The cop handed the priest the ticket, and said, "*Go, and sin no more.*" That is what Jesus says every time we approach Christ in the Sacrament of Confession. God is full of mercy. Let us be part of that group of whom Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen me yet believe." Let us trust in him and say, "Jesus, I trust in you."