

Homily for Divine Mercy Sunday

Today is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Today is Divine Mercy Sunday, the 8th day of the Feast of Easter in which Blessed Pope John Paul II said that we receive the Easter Gift.

And what is this very special Easter Gift? It is the special gift of the total forgiveness of all sins and punishment that the Catholic Church offers in the form of a plenary indulgence today.

But, why today? What sets this day apart from any other day? Today is the Octave Day of Easter; the last day of the world's greatest feast. And shouldn't the world's greatest feast offer the world's greatest gift; the total forgiveness of all sins and punishment, or in other words, "a straight ticket to Heaven" if we should die today in this perfect state of sanctifying grace?

And what is Divine Mercy? The word "Divine" means "given by God" or "like God". The word "Mercy" means "the refraining from harming or punishing offenders". So simply put, Divine Mercy is "God refraining from harming or punishing offenders".

How did this feast come to be established in the Catholic Church? In the Jubilee Year 2000, Blessed Pope John Paul II established this new feast indicating that he had fulfilled the will of Christ. He must have said this because he believed that our Church needed to re-emphasize the tremendous gift of Divine Mercy that the Lord wants to pour out on each and every one of us.

In the Old Testament, God told Moses to celebrate their most important feast called the Day of Atonement, once a year, and to prepare for that feast, they were to afflict themselves and offer up animal blood sacrifices. On the last day, God would forgive their sins. It was for them, an annual preparation for the Judgment. The Jews of today still celebrate this feast, which they call "Yom Kippur". This is the Jews' biggest feast and it lasts for a full ten days. In fact, most of the important feasts in the Old Testament lasted for 7 or more days. Even weddings would last for a whole week or more. So why shouldn't we celebrate Easter for at least a full 8 days?

So this Feast of Divine Mercy (Divine Mercy Sunday) is like our modern day fulfillment of the "Day of Atonement". An annual preparation for the Judgment, an annual feast to get perfectly right with God. Are we now starting to understand how important this feast is for us, today?

Ok, let's take it a little further. What is the last instruction that Jesus gave His Church before He died and what is the first instruction He gave His Church after He came to life again? The very last instruction was the Sacrament of Holy Communion, the Eucharist, at the Last Supper. The very first instruction, after His Resurrection from the dead, was the institution of the Sacrament of Confession. These 2 sacraments comprise the Fount of Divine Mercy. The 2 sacraments needed to receive the total forgiveness of sins and punishment on this feastday.

Recall what Jesus said to His Apostles in the Gospel today: "Receive the Holy Spirit, whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained". This happened on the very night of the Resurrection when the Apostles were hiding from fear of the Jews. Also,

recall that St. Thomas wasn't there on that Sunday, but was actually there on the following Sunday. Could this be God's Providence to set up this feast associated with trust in Jesus?

Now let's look at the Divine Mercy Image. Why would Jesus want this image to be blessed and venerated on this day? Aren't the Sacraments of Holy Communion and Confession displayed in this image? By Jesus' own words, the rays indicate the Blood and Water that gushed from His heart when it was pierced on the Cross. The Catholic Church teaches that the Blood and Water that gushed out from Jesus on the Cross are the Sacraments of the Church.

Jesus said that the Water is what makes souls righteous and the Blood is the life of souls. So we can see that the Water washes away our sins, just like in Baptism or Confession and that the Blood gives us life, just like in Holy Communion. Remember when Jesus said, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise Him on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent Me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on Me will have life because of Me."

In the Divine Mercy image, Jesus is moving towards us and asking us to trust in Him. He is asking us not to be afraid to approach Him and to ask Him for His mercy in the Sacrament of Confession. He is calling us to wash away our sins and to receive Holy Communion without stain of sin, because He wants to give us the absolute greatest gift possible today. For Holy Communion to be miraculous, we have to be completely clean from any sin or desire to sin.

Don't ever be afraid to approach Jesus, waiting for you in the Confessional. Jesus told Saint Faustina that every time we approach the Confessional, that He Himself is waiting there for us. That He is only hidden by the priest and that the priest is, for Him, only a screen.

So, if you haven't had a chance to make your yearly Confession in preparation for your Easter Communion, don't miss out on this incredible opportunity today to have all of your sins and punishment forgiven. The Catholic Church allows about 20 days for Confession, before or after Divine Mercy Sunday, to gain the special plenary indulgence that is being offered today.

If you think that you are in the state of serious or mortal sin, the Church teaches that you must go to Confession before receiving Holy Communion. If you have gone to Confession but have fallen back into venial sin, you should make a perfect Act of Contrition before receiving Holy Communion. The Church teaches that missing Sunday Mass, without good reason, may be a serious sin. So if you have been missing Sunday Mass, why not get a brand new start in life?

Don't miss out on this excellent opportunity to be prepared for the Second Coming of Christ. We never know when He will call on us. We always have to be ready to stand before Him.

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Taken from the www.DivineMercySunday.com website.