

The Deacon's Bench



by Deacon
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2nd Sunday of Easter:

What I Want is Mercy, Not Sacrifice, Says the Lord

Reflections
on Sacred
Scripture

We can say "Happy Easter" today – because this is the Octave of Easter, the eighth day – the great Day of the Lord's resurrection from the dead that is beyond time and space. Many of us had the joy of participating in the great liturgies of Holy Week that began on Passion Sunday. We celebrated the Chrism Mass at the Cathedral on Monday and then the Sacred Triduum: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil on Saturday night. These were amazing celebrations of the Church universal and of our own Parish here at Saint Mel.

The scriptures the Church gives on this 'Great Today' of Easter are so rich, we can only digest a little of at a time. And this is why we gather each week to share the story and break the bread, as we see in the first reading the Church has done since day one. We find in the Acts of the Apostles today an outline of the Mass we celebrate each week. We engage the 'teaching of the Apostles' in the biblical proclamations, the 'fellowship' we have with each other gathered here, and the 'breaking of the bread' of the Eucharist. It is all here at the Mass, an invitation to meet the risen Lord in word and sacrament like the post-resurrection appearances found in the gospels, especially in the Gospel of John.

The successive occasions of Jesus appearing in a locked room show us Jesus' immediate priorities: to bring peace and healing, to bring wholeness and completeness as the word "Shalom" implies. He says "Peace be with you" - Shalom. And gave us there and then the sacrament of peace, Penance, the forgiveness of sins entrusted to the disciples as a ministry. The scripture says Jesus breathed on them, just as God breathed life into Adam in the Genesis story, and said, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them...." One of the seven sacramental treasures of the Church.

But one of their members was missing on that occasion, Thomas, known as Didymus (which means 'the twin'). Thomas' story is so much like our own we are given this same Gospel passage each year on the Octave of Easter to comfort us in our own doubts. Thomas' story is only found in John's Gospel, nowhere else. The occasion affirms the experience so many of us have – that faith does not come all at once. That there are even times it does not come at all, and we are filled with doubts. Coming to faith is a life-long process and a journey, a pilgrimage. Thomas came to faith in an encounter with suffering, in an intimate connection with woundedness.

All of us have wounds. When we are wounded even though we may forgive and be forgiven, the wounds, like Jesus' wounds, remain. Thomas's story informs us that when our wounds are transformed through an encounter with the resurrected Christ, we are transformed. This is where Mercy comes in. We hear it in the Psalm response today – his mercy endures forever. This is why Pope Saint John Paul II called this day, Divine Mercy Sunday. And on this day, Jesus says to us, "As the Father has sent me so I send you" – forgiven and healed, go in Peace.