

Homily for Divine Mercy Sunday – 2023

Second Sunday of Easter

By Deacon Richard Hay

“Seeing is believing...”

Two sayings we are all likely familiar with come from today’s gospel:

“Seeing is believing” and “Doubting Thomas”.

As we hear, Thomas is not present when Jesus first visits the apostles in the upper room after His resurrection. However, when Thomas once again joins them after the Lord’s appearance, they quickly share with Thomas that they have seen the Risen Lord. Thomas then responds as many of us might have responded to such unbelievable news – that he will need to touch Jesus’s wounds to believe.

I find that a fascinating response, don’t you? Thomas has been around the other apostles for three-years as they travelled the local countryside right alongside of Jesus. Suddenly, he doesn’t seem to believe or trust what they are telling him.

However, it isn't hard to understand why Thomas responded as he did, is it? Remember, as I mentioned last week in my Easter homily, the apostles were experiencing this in real time and did not yet fully understand all of it.

Thomas does get his chance to see and believe that Jesus is risen when He once again appears to the apostles in the upper room. He immediately addresses Thomas and offers His wounds for him to see and touch so that, as Jesus says to Thomas, he does not remain "unbelieving, but believe."

Thomas then gives one of the most beautiful responses: "My Lord and My God."

That moment of acknowledgement and belief is powerful and many today still use that same phrase to acknowledge Christ's presence when they encounter Him in the Eucharist.

Jesus's reply to Thomas after this exchange - "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Jesus is talking about us and everyone else who chooses to believe in Him after his ascension into heaven. All those over the centuries who have not seen the physical bodily presence of Jesus, that was made in our likeness, but yet they still make the decision to believe.

Thomas had the opportunity to see the Risen Christ which turned his doubt into belief but how do we do that today in our faith lives?

Believing without seeing is not an easy task, is it?

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians lays out three simple words that, when we look into them, are precious gifts from God that help us to believe, and he shares them in the thirteenth chapter of that letter.

Paul has just written about the attributes of love, scripture we often hear at weddings, many of you likely know it "Love is patient, Love is Kind..."

He ends with this verse - "So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

"Faith, Hope, and Love"

Let's start with Faith.

We are blessed to have vast deposits of faith from the Church that helps sustain our faith and plenty is provided for us to "see and believe..."

The sacraments are our starting point. Although we do not have the benefit of Jesus's physical presence after the resurrection like the apostles did

- we have these beautiful sacraments that He left for us as signs of God's grace and mercy.

Baptism, Confirmation, Matrimony, Holy Orders, Holy Communion, Reconciliation, and Anointing of the Sick.

These sacraments bring us to belief in God our Father and Jesus Christ His Son through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in each one of them.

As you have heard me say before, those last three are repeatable sacraments - Holy Communion, Reconciliation, and when needed, Anointing of the Sick - receive them often to receive God's mercy and let Jesus accompany us on this earthly journey of faith.

How about Hope?

Hope is integral to our faith. The hope I am speaking of is not a wishful hope - like "I hope the Jaguars win the Super Bowl".

No, the hope Paul is referring to is the "I hope in the resurrection" kind of hope - as in to be a part of it - I look forward to it.

St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that our resurrected bodies will be glorious beyond imagination. We will never age, require no food, never experience illness, be free from all disorders and will live this way forever."

That is the kind of hope Paul is referring to in Corinthians and it should also be the hope we carry with us in our belief in Jesus.

Love – “the greatest of these is love.”

Where would we be without the love of God?

The love of God to not only create the universe we live in but to also create us in His likeness and image.

The love of the Father to send His only begotten Son to become fully human and still be fully divine as the Son of Mary. Ultimately, offering Himself on the cross for our sinfulness.

“There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for a friend.”

The love of God in Christ’s full presence in the Most Blessed Sacrament – Jesus’s body, blood, soul, and divinity in the Eucharist.

The love of Christ who doesn’t appear to the apostles in his resurrected body to chastise them for abandoning Him at the cross but to offer them peace and the gift of the Holy Spirit which comes from the love of the Father and the Son – to accompany them and us on our journey – to strengthen our faith and belief.

The love of the gift, graces, and mercy of the sacraments that the Church received from God the Father through His Son Jesus to sustain us on our journey.

Finally, the love of the two most important commandments Jesus gave us:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” and the second “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

So, as we all leave here and head into the world, carry the faith, hope, and love of God’s Divine Mercy and remember as Jesus said to Thomas and now to all of us, do not remain “unbelieving, but believe.”