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2nd Sunday of Easter - 16 April 2023

Michele Purcell

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16 April 2023

Second Sunday of Easter

Divine Mercy Sunday

Reflection by Michele Purcell

Introduction

The readings on this Divine Mercy Sunday challenge us to continue the work of the risen Jesus in the community. As true Christian disciples we take on the responsibility of bestowing forgiveness and mercy to any and all of the people in our community and beyond.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you are the mercy of God. Lord have mercy.

You are the life of the Church. Christ have mercy.

You are the risen Lord. Lord have mercy.

Collect

The Oration

God of everlasting mercy,

who in the very recurrence of the paschal feast

kindle the faith of the people you have made your own,

increase, we pray, the grace you have bestowed,

that all may grasp and rightly understand

in what font they have been washed,

by whose Spirit they have been reborn,

by whose Blood they have been redeemed.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever.

This ancient prayer is brought into the Roman missal from the related liturgical families of the gallican regions. It places the worshipper in the recurring Easter cycle of festivities rather than 'in the day' of the previous Sunday. It is replete with baptismal inferences, allowing the oration to address directly the newly baptised as well as rekindling the faith of long standing believers. In English the prayer closes with a strong rhetorical flourish. It petitions the merciful one that the faithful may be right minded about the power of the resurrection. This is followed by three key

metaphors of salvation. The image of being washed clean from sin is followed by one of rebirth in the Spirit, both immediately related to baptism. Redemption by the blood of Christ relates biblically to the sacrifice of Isaac as well as the passing of the angel of death over the blooded doorposts of the enslaved Israelites on that first Passover night (Ex 12:21-32). Both themes are present in the readings of the Easter vigil. In a form of liturgical serendipity, the entire prayer is based upon faith in the everlasting mercy of God, and so forms a bridge with the recent secondary affirmation of the day as also the Sunday for the celebration of a Christological interpretation of divine Mercy.

Acknowledgement

The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by Gerard Moore for the Canadian liturgical journal *Celebrate!* (Novalis Press). Our thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

First Reading

Acts 2:42-47

Each of today's readings has an underlying theme of joy. In the first reading Luke describes a certain euphoria as the whole community of the early Christian faithful prayed and lived together in harmony. 'They shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God and were looked up to by everyone.'

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 117(118):2-4, 13-15, 22-24

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love is everlasting. Or alleluia.

Psalm 117 is a joyful song praising God whose love has no end. It seems to describe the disciples in John's Gospel who were fearful – but became full of joy after they came face to face with the risen Jesus.

Second Reading

1 Peter 1:3-9

Peter praises the faith of the early Christians which has persisted despite being 'plagued by all sorts of trials.' Even though they had not seen the risen Jesus face to face, Peter rejoices in their faith and love of God which has filled them with indescribable joy.

Gospel Reading

John 20:19-31

The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord.

Reflection

As today's gospel opens, we are acutely aware of the fact that Jesus had died! The whole lives of Jesus' disciples had been turned upside down and they were in shock. They had isolated themselves in a room because of this – and 'for fear of the Jews' (v19). ('The Jews' is the unfortunate catchphrase used in the gospel of John which refers to some of the Jewish synagogue leaders who were violently

antagonistic to Jesus' followers – both in Jesus' time and more particularly in the time that John's gospel was being written).

John tells us that it was on the evening of the first day of the week (the Christian sabbath) that Jesus appeared to his disciples and 'stood among them' (v19). This timing is significant. It implied that it marked a new beginning for the life of the Christian community. Since all the disciples, (except for Mary Magdalene and 'the disciple Jesus loved'), had abandoned Jesus during his passion and death, they may have expected to be thoroughly chastised. Jesus, however, immediately allays their fears and offers them love and forgiveness with the traditional Hebrew words of greeting, 'Peace be with you' (v19b), and he showed them the wounds on his hands and his side. We are told that 'the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord' (v20) – they accepted and believed in him. As soon as this happened Jesus gave them a commission with the words, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you' (v21). He is trusting them now, as sons and daughters of God, commissioning them to continue his work in the world.

It is significant that Jesus then *breathed* on them – gifting the disciples with the Holy Spirit. The word 'breathes' holds connotations of the creation story in Genesis when God breathed into the nostrils of Adam 'the breath of life' (Gen 2:7). John is indicating that the Holy Spirit is present – creating the new life of the Christian community.

After the breathing Jesus says,

Receive the Holy Spirit,
for those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven;
for those whose sins you retain, they are retained (vv 22, 23).

This then is to be their work. They are given the authority to forgive sins – to offer mercy and compassion to everyone, especially to the most disadvantaged, and to all those who are open to receive – just as Jesus had done while he was alive. Jesus would not leave them again, but things could never be quite the same either. He would always be standing alongside and within them through the gift of his Spirit, but now they must take full responsibility for their new role in the world.

The second part of their commission 'for those whose sins you retain, they are retained, (v23) must surely convey a serious concern for any disciple. After being so thoroughly forgiven themselves for deserting Jesus in his hour of need and for totally misunderstanding him, who would dare to hinder the work of the Spirit by ever withholding love and forgiveness?

The first and second parts of Chapter 20 in John's Gospel feature the most prominent of Jesus disciples: Mary Magdalene, 'the disciple Jesus loved', Peter, the disciples locked in a room together, and Thomas. The evangelist makes it very clear that not one of these followers had complete faith in Jesus at the beginning of chapter 20. Not one of them expected that Jesus would rise from the dead! We, the readers, watch the drama unfold as each disciple progresses from dejection and no faith in Jesus – sometimes through a stage of partial belief – then arrives at a state of utter joy as they recognise Jesus alive and with them again. We witness the manifestation of Jesus' love and compassion in the disciples' transformation. This is just what disciples must continue to do in the world – in Jesus' place.

The dramatic events in John's gospel today illustrate that it is necessary for all of us to come to faith through a direct and personal encounter with the risen Jesus. Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:1-18) and the disciples in today's gospel demonstrate that there are different ways of coming to this realisation. When we do, we become aware of the presence and action of Jesus in our lives which can be akin to the feeling of falling in love, and which results in a heightened and lasting joy – despite the ups and downs of daily living.

There was joy in this revelation for Jesus' disciples, nevertheless there was suffering too – because things could never be quite the same again after Jesus' death. Even as they confessed their belief in Jesus and received the Holy Spirit, Jesus' resurrected body was still before them, bearing the scars of his wounds, reminding them, and us, that suffering will always be a part of the lives of the followers of Jesus.

Today's gospel ends with the words that explain the whole purpose of the Gospel of John:

There were many other signs that Jesus worked and the disciples saw, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name.

We could take a moment in our busy lives to stop now and simply breathe – sharing this breath with the Spirit of Jesus since we are believers. What awareness of new life emerges in our consciousness?



Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

The psalmist today reminds us to 'give thanks to the Lord for he is good,' and that with God's love marvellous things occur. Let us now bring our needs and the needs of the world to our Father in prayer.

Petitions

We pray for Pope Francis and leaders of the Church, clergy, religious and lay people, as they renew their commitment to live lives of joy in the Gospel, and that their joy might inspire all members of their flocks to build lives of gratitude.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for leaders of nations and communities, that they might realise that like members of the early Church, we hold our resources in common.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for people who are closed off from our community because of addictions. May Jesus appear in the locked room of their hearts and help them to find new life in him.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who, like St. Thomas, have had their faith shaken. May our God use the love of this community to reach out and assist in strengthening them.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those in our community who are suffering that they are able to more fully rejoice in a merciful God who loves them. May those who reach out to care for them be given the grace to bring peace and healing.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

God of mercy, you call us each by name and know the ways to reach out to us in our fragility. We ask that you hear these prayers we bring before you and strengthen each of us to live the lives you have called us to. We ask this through the power of the Spirit and in the name of Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Second Sunday of Easter, Year A (16 April 2023)

Title	AOV1	AOVK	CWB	CWBII	GA
A trusting psalm				293	455
Be not afraid	114			653	449
Bread of the world in mercy broken			631		
Christ is alive, with joy we sing			639	353	365
Christ the Lord is ris'n today			647		
Church of God			652	471	480
Easter glory fills the sky			671	358	366
Eye has not seen	146				466
Glory and praise to our God	16			491	417
Godhead here in hiding			696	162	
God with hidden majesty					388
Great God of mercy				126	
In the breaking of the bread	58				
Jesus Christ is ris'n today				360	361
Lift up your hearts				539	416
Lord Christ, true peace of all above			734		
O Father, I know I can count on your mercy			762		
O sons and daughters			778	349	359
Peace I leave with you			785	517	
Praise, my soul, the king of Heaven	78		789	588	
Sing to the mountains	92			604	362
Sing with all the saints in glory				147	
Take and eat				608	198
That Easter day with joy was bright				366	
The Spirit of God			832	388	185
There's a wideness in God's mercy			838	624	
Thine be the glory, risen, conqu'ring Son				368	
This day was made by the Lord	183			369	356
This is the day		159			
This joyful Eastertide			845		
We remember	81				446
We walk by faith	63			641	447

Title	AOVNG	S&S1	S&S2
Call for mercy	16		
Give thanks to the Lord			276
God is forgiveness	55		
Peace I leave			350
Thank God for he is good		80	

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 117: *Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting./Alleluia!*

	CWB	GA	JOBA	LPA
Psalm 117	298	71	pg. 42	pg. 46

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Easter alleluia (TT/SYJ) [Gathering, Recessional]

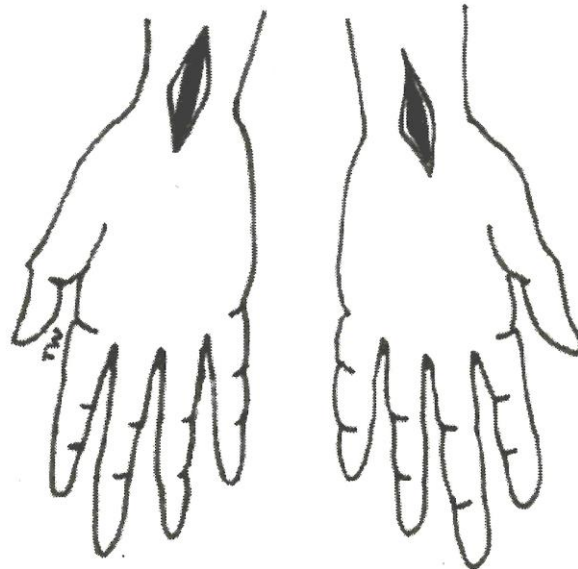
This is the day Ps 118 (LCC) *Ps 117/118* [Children's Lectionary]

This is the day (FWS) *Based on Ps 117/118* [Gathering, Recessional]

Hearts on fire (Vs 2 & 3) (SHOF) [Recessional]

Mercy shall be yours (DOM) [Recessional]

Litany of mercy (DOM) *Based on Ps 136* [Gifts, Communion]



*Happy are those
who have not seen
yet believe.*