



LIVING THE GOSPEL

**Divine Mercy Sunday.
April 27th 2025**

Theme: "We have seen the Lord."

Gathering Prayer

All: 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, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: John 20:19-31

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

Gospel Focus

In this gospel, the hints of resurrection we saw last week finally culminate in Jesus' appearance. Jesus himself, the one they saw crucified and buried, returns to his followers and stands in their midst. His body is still his own human body, still bearing

the scars of his passion. It is really he, the one they loved and followed, the one who changed their lives. And he is going to change their lives again. His return will not be for long, and they will not all go back to the way things were. They have a job to do now, and Jesus immediately starts his disciples for mission, to be sent out on his behalf. He breathes the Holy Spirit on them so that they will not go forth alone. His physical presence will not remain, but he will go with them always, his life transcending the usual boundaries of time and space to which we are still bound.

Gospel Reflection

In 1989 Sister Thea Bowman was invited to speak to the US Bishops about the needs of the Black Catholic Community. At the end of her address, she asked the bishops to sing with her and to link arms, as in the days of the civil rights marches. Weakened from cancer that took her life the following year, she nonetheless led the bishops with her powerful voice as they joined her in singing "We Shall Overcome"

She invited them to stand up, reach out, and take each other's hands, which they did. "No, not like that," she admonished, as they tentatively took one another's hands. "Cross your arms over your chest and then take the hands on either side," she instructed. "That's how we did it in the civil rights marches. You have to move in together, close to one another, and hold on tight so that no one is lost in the struggle.

The instruction to hold on tight to one another is part of Jesus' recurring message in the Gospel of John. After feeding the multitude, he says that God's will is that he "should not lose anything" of what has been given to him (6:39). Speaking as a shepherd, he declares that no one will snatch his sheep out of his hand (10:28). In his final prayer, he says he guarded all those whom the Father had given him and not one of them was lost (17:12; see also 18:9). In today's gospel, when the risen Christ appears to the fearful disciples, he empowers them to continue his mission of drawing all to himself (12:32) and not allowing any to be lost in the struggle.

As the risen Christ stands in their midst, we see that his peace comes from letting go of fear and the desire for vengeance and from surrounding the violence with forgiveness and reconciliation. This kind of peace does not ignore the brutal suffering inflicted on the victim. Jesus holds out his wounded hands and side as evidence that is never erased. The pain from the violence can be transformed, however, into joy and peace, through the power of the Holy Spirit and through the abiding presence of Christ, who makes forgiveness possible.

The disciples are not to stay huddled together in fear behind locked doors; rather; they are sent by Christ to continue his mission of healing and forgiving. Just as the Creator breathed life into the nostrils of the first human creature, making it into a human being (Gen 2:7), so Jesus breathes life into the disciples, empowering them to forgive everything and everyone they can. The second half of verse 23 usually translated "whose sins you retain they are retained," does not have the word sins in the Greek text. A better way to understand it is "whomever you hold fast are held fast." The sense is that through processes of forgiveness and reconciliation, disciples of Jesus continue his mission of holding on to all, arms folded across our chests, clenching each hand tightly, so that none, especially the most vulnerable, are lost in the struggle.

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — Acts 5:12-16

¹² Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. ¹³ None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high honor.

¹⁴ And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women, ¹⁵ so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶ The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Responsorial Reading — Ps 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

R: Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting. (R)

Let the house of Israel say, "His mercy endures forever." Let the house of Aaron say, "His mercy endures forever." Let those who fear the Lord say, "His mercy endures forever." **(R)**

I was hard pressed and was falling, but the Lord helped me. My strength and my courage is the Lord, and he has been my savior. The joyful shout of victory in the tents of the just. **(R)**

The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it. **(R)**

Second Reading — Revelation 1:9-13, 17-19

⁹ I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹ saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." ¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast. ...

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ¹⁹ Now write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter.

Catechism of The Catholic Church

442. Such is not the case for Simon Peter when he confesses Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God", for Jesus responds solemnly: "Flesh and blood has not *revealed* this to you, but *my Father* who is in heaven."(Mt 16:16-17) Similarly Paul will write, regarding his conversion on the road to Damascus, "When he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles..."(Gal 1:15-16) "And in the synagogues immediately [Paul] proclaimed Jesus, saying, 'He is the Son of God.'"(Acts 9:20) From the beginning this acknowledgment of Christ's divine sonship will be the center of the apostolic faith, first professed by Peter as the Church's foundation.(Cf. I Th 1:10; Jn 20:31; Mt 16:18)

575. Many of Jesus' deeds and words constituted a "sign of contradiction",(Lk 2:34) but more so for the religious authorities in Jerusalem, whom the Gospel according to John

often calls simply "the Jews", (Cf. Jn 1:19; 2:18; 5:10; 7:13; 9:22; 18:12; 19:38; 20:19) than for the ordinary People of God. (Jn 7:48-49) To be sure, Christ's relations with the Pharisees were not exclusively polemical. Some Pharisees warn him of the danger he was courting; (Cf. Lk 13:31) Jesus praises some of them, like the scribe of *Mark* 12:34, and dines several times at their homes. (Cf. Lk 7:36; 14:1) Jesus endorses some of the teachings imparted by this religious elite of God's people: the resurrection of the dead, (Cf. Mt 22:23-34; Lk 20:39) certain forms of piety (almsgiving, fasting and prayer), (Cf. Mt 6:18) the custom of addressing God as Father, and the centrality of the commandment to love God and neighbor. (Cf. Mk 12:28-34)

643. Given all these testimonies, Christ's Resurrection cannot be interpreted as something outside the physical order, and it is impossible not to acknowledge it as an historical fact. It is clear from the facts that the disciples' faith was drastically put to the test by their master's Passion and death on the cross, which he had foretold. (Cf. Lk 22:31-32) The shock provoked by the Passion was so great that at least some of the disciples did not at once believe in the news of the Resurrection. Far from showing us a community seized by a mystical exaltation, the Gospels present us with disciples demoralized ("looking sad" (Lk 24:17; cf. Jn 20:19)) and frightened. For they had not believed the holy women returning from the tomb and had regarded their words as an "idle tale". (Lk 24:11; cf. Mk 16:11, 13) When Jesus reveals himself to the Eleven on Easter evening, "he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen." (Mk 16:14)

645. By means of touch and the sharing of a meal, the risen Jesus establishes direct contact with his disciples. He invites them in this way to recognize that he is not a ghost and above all to verify that the risen body in which he appears to them is the same body that had been tortured and crucified, for it still bears the traces of his Passion. (Cf. Lk 24:30, 39-40, 41-43; Jn 20:20, 27; 21:9, 13-15) Yet at the same time this authentic, real body possesses the new properties of a glorious body: not limited by space and time but able to be present how and when he wills; for Christ's humanity can no longer be confined to earth, and belongs henceforth only to the Father's divine realm. (Cf. Mt 28:9, 16-17; Lk 24:15, 36; Jn 20:14, 17, 19, 26; 21:4) For this reason too the risen Jesus enjoys the sovereign freedom of appearing as he wishes: in the guise of a gardener or in other forms familiar to his disciples, precisely to awaken their faith. (Cf. Mk 16:12; Jn 20:14-16; 21:4, 7)

730. At last Jesus' hour arrives (Cf. Jn 13:1; 17:1) he commends his spirit into the Father's hands (Cf. Lk 23:46; Jn 19:30) at the very moment when by his death he conquers death, so that, "raised from the dead by the glory of the Father," (Rom 6:4) he might immediately *give* the Holy Spirit by "breathing" on his disciples. (Cf. Jn 20:22) From this hour onward, the mission of Christ and the Spirit becomes the mission of the Church: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." (Jn 20:21; cf. Mt 28:19; Lk 24:47-48; Acts 1:8)

858. Jesus is the Father's Emissary. From the beginning of his ministry, he "called to him those whom he desired; And he appointed twelve, whom also he named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach." (Mk 3:13-14) From then on, they would also be his "emissaries" (Greek *apostoloi*). In them, Christ continues his own mission: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." (Jn 20:21; cf. 13:20; 17:18) The apostles' ministry is the continuation of his mission; Jesus said to the Twelve: "he who receives you receives me." (Mt 10:40; cf. Lk 10:16)

1087. Thus the risen Christ, by giving the Holy Spirit to the apostles, entrusted to them his power of sanctifying (Cf. Jn 20:21-23) they became sacramental signs of Christ. By

the power of the same Holy Spirit they entrusted this power to their successors. This "apostolic succession" structures the whole liturgical life of the Church and is itself sacramental, handed on by the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Sharing and Discussion

1. Have you ever locked your heart against the outside world or anyone in particular out of fear? How did you overcome such fear?
2. "Jesus tells the disciples, "Peace be with you," three times in today's gospel. How can you find peace in the Lord? How can we contribute towards the peace of others? Have you felt peace in the presence of others?
3. In today's first reading the apostles carry on the work of Jesus, performing signs and wonders as the Holy Spirit enables them. We are also called to carry on Jesus' work. How do you proclaim the good news of the resurrection in your everyday life?

Closing Prayer

All: God of mercy and love, you call us to live in harmony with one another. Show us the path of peace. We offer our prayers through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.