Reflections by Fr. Dan

The Second Sunday of Easter is always Divine Mercy Sunday. Though the Divine Mercy message is not new to the teachings of the Church, Sr. Faustina's *Diary* sparked a great movement and a strong and significant focus on the mercy of Christ. Saint John Paul II canonized Sr. Faustina in 2000 making her the "first saint of the new millennium." Speaking of Sr. Faustina and the importance of the message contained in her *Diary*, the Pope called her "the great apostle of Divine Mercy in our time."

The reading for Divine Mercy Sunday also shows us the depth of Chris’s mercy. In today’s First Reading, we see the first days of a Christian community redeemed and reconciled through the grace of Christ. We see the first believers sharing their lives, their bread, and their prayers. We also see that the Apostles have a special role in the community: believers are devoted to their teaching. The faith, handed down by Christ to the Apostles, and then handed on through the centuries to us, continues to unite us. Those first believers did not believe in a vacuum: the Apostles showed many signs and wonders to bolster their faith. Even today, when Christians live in harmony, not only with fellow believers but also with their fellow man, they are a sign and a wonder of the reconciling power of Christ. *Lumen Gentium* teaches that the Church is called to be a sign and instrument of “both of a very closely-knit union with God and the unity of the whole human race” (n.1). The believers did not do it alone, and neither do we. Our Lord has given us sacred ministers to help us live in harmony, and one way they do so is through the sacrament of Reconciliation.

In today’s Second Reading St. Peter reminds us that the great mercy of God is what gives birth to a new hope in us. The Resurrection itself is a sign of the mercy of God. Our hope is alive because Christ was raised from the dead. Before his Resurrection, the sins of mankind, from Adam on down, lead to one dire conclusion: death and eternal separation from God. In Christ’s Resurrection, we have a living hope that through his mercy death will not have the last word in our lives. We too will inherit the eternal life that he won for us on the Cross. However, this “inheritance” is not automatic. Through trials and our efforts at purification, we show that we truly desire the gift of his mercy. Despite Our Lord’s victory we stumble or repeatedly fall, which is why we need his mercy repeatedly.

In today’s Gospel Our Lord shows that he has a special mission for his Apostles: to be the instruments and channels of that mercy for the whole world, through the sacrament of Confession. The Apostles need to be reconciled with the Lord they’d abandoned when he needed them most. Jesus tells them twice, “Peace be with you.” He shows them his hands and feet so that they can see the wounds and know it’s not a dream or an illusion, and the fact that they abandoned him for was not a dream or illusion either: The sin really happened, the price really had to be paid for that sin, He paid the price in full. With the words “Peace be with you,” He says what’s past is past. This reconciliation is meant to be maintained and to spread. Our Lord breathes on the apostles and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” This power comes from Christ through the Apostles, and through the bishops and priests that came after them, through the Sacrament of Confession. When Jesus says “Peace be with you” twice in this passage he is showing us that forgiveness is not a one-shot deal, or else Baptism would be enough: we’re always in need of his
mercy because we continue to battle with our sins. When we examine our lives, we always see moments where we could have done more and better, and Confession gives us the peace and grace to keep trying to do more and better.

Devine Mercy Sunday helps us to see the great mercy that Christ has bestowed on us. He is always there for us no matter what we have done, and he is always ready to take us back. He also wants us to practice mercy towards those around us. On this Devine Mercy Sunday we continue to rely on St. Faustina as a constant reminder of the message to trust in Jesus' endless mercy and to live life mercifully toward others. We also turn to her in prayer and request her intercession to our merciful Savior on our behalf.

In a normal year, there would be events around the diocese that we could attend on this Devine Mercy Sunday. However, because of COVID-19, these “gatherings” will be electronic. If you go to https://www.dmdioce.se.org/resources/worship/coronavirus, you will find a message from Bishop Joensen on Devine Mercy Sunday. You will also find on that page a link to a schedule of events and resources. I encourage you to check this link out and see what is available. You will find several events you can take part in to celebrate Devine Mercy Sunday. There are also resources you can take advantage of to make Devine Mercy Sunday a meaningful and prayerful experience.