

Bishop Jaime Soto – Homily for Divine Mercy Sunday  
April 11, 2010

Why is the resurrection of Jesus important to us? Is it simply a matter of knowing that it happened? Does it matter because we hope for the same thing? We want to experience our own resurrection? The fact that it happened or even the possibility it might happen to us, is not enough to explain the joy of Easter.

The disciples had already heard about the rumors of the empty tomb. Some of their group had already announced that he had been raised from the dead. Despite this startling information, the disciples remained very fearful. The gospel today, tells us how they locked themselves in a room because of their fears. The information about the resurrection was not enough. What turned their fears into joy was meeting the risen Jesus. The encounter with risen Jesus turned the information into a personal experience. More than the resurrection, more than rising from the dead, the disciples stood in the presence of Jesus who had died and rose from the tomb. Jesus personally greeted them with peace. He personally breathed his spirit upon them. The personal relationship with the risen Christ is what gave them joy and filled them with peace.

An essential part of this joyful encounter is that they recognized him. This may seem obvious but let's probe this for a moment. This joyful encounter would not have been possible if they were not familiar with him. Before the shocking events of his tortuous passion and anguishing death on the cross, they had walked with him, talked with him, worked with him, and shared many a meal with him. When he then comes to them on the evening of that first day of the week, while they were locked in the room, they knew who he was. He was not just a ghost. He was not some stranger who had mysteriously wandered into their midst. They recognized their friend.

This becomes even more apparent to us when we hear the story of Thomas. The doubting Thomas was not interested in the facts. He was not swayed by the stories. He wanted to touch Jesus. Nothing less would do. Jesus came to Thomas. The reading tells us that upon appearing to the disciples for the second time, he went directly to Thomas and spoke to him personally, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe."

Today we celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday. Mercy is personal. It is a personal gift. We can speak of life, peace, grace, hope and joy. In talking about these things we may even know what they mean. They begin to mean so much more when life, peace, grace, hope and joy are the gifts from personally knowing the mercy that comes from the Lord Jesus.

Mercy is defined as compassion shown to an offender. This is what Jesus personally offers us. Because of his great mercy the disciples come to know the true meaning of life, peace, grace, hope, and joy. They believe in the resurrection as more than just a fact. They believe in the resurrected person of Jesus whose death on the cross gained the mercy of the Father. The risen Jesus brought them the Father's mercy so that they could personally experience the peace and joy of this wonderful gift. Thomas's personal encounter with the risen Jesus makes this clear for us. Thomas touched the wounds of Christ. The pierced hands and side healed the wounds of Thomas's sins and sins of all those believe in the Lord Jesus. As the St. Peter told us in his first letter, By his wounds we were healed (I Pt. 2.24).

For this reason, the death and resurrection of Jesus are not two separate events. They are part of the one saving mystery of Divine Mercy. Thomas, upon meeting the risen Christ touches the wounds that healed him and saved him. This divine mercy was revealed to Thomas and the other disciples through the resurrected humanity of the crucified Christ who came to his friends to bring them the blessing of peace and the enduring gift of the Holy Spirit.

We come to this Sunday, as we do every Sunday, to touch the divine mercy that was poured out for us from the wounds of Christ. The human and earthly signs of this Eucharist bring us to a sacramental encounter with the same Lord Jesus who invites us, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe."

The Lord Jesus breathes his marvelous, merciful Spirit upon us sinners so that we might know that His wounds have healed us. This same Spirit makes us messengers of his mercy. Our humble humanity now shares in the resurrection of Christ so that the Lord's divine mercy might touch the lives of others. Jesus comes personally to us so that our person might touch the hearts of our brothers and sisters who live in the doubt and fear of sin.

The resurrection of Christ is not a singular, solitary event. The mercy of Jesus gives us a share in his death and resurrection so that we can bring the peace of his marvelous mercy into a world locked up by fear and doubt. Our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus charges our person with the power of the risen Christ. His spirit, breathed upon us, heals us. It also helps us heal others through the personal relationships we share with others.

Think for a moment of all those whom you encounter in your daily lives, your spouse, your children, your brothers and sisters, your co-workers, your classmates. Your words, your manners, your kind attention, your sacrifices can be the instrument of his mercy that brings grace, hope, and health to others.

Think of those who are the lost and forgotten: the desperate woman considering an abortion, the criminal hardened by years of incarceration, the unemployed parent, and homeless family, the disoriented, disheveled transient begging on a corner. They will know nothing of the resurrection of the merciful Christ until a disciple chooses to meet them, personally bringing to them the consolation of the Lord's peace and the hopeful breath of his spirit.

These are all the works of mercy. They are more than good deeds. Because we have received the merciful Spirit of the Lord, all that we do has the potential to be a sacramental touch of his mercy and grace upon the world. On this Divine Mercy Sunday, let us ask the Lord of all tender mercies to strengthen our resolve to be His messengers of mercy and so renew the face of the earth with His eternal Easter joy.