

## Second Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday)

The church of Easter Sunday evening adopted a very similar position to the one we're currently in – hunkered down, doors closed, socially distanced. Not because it was told to, but because it was frightened, fearful, anxious.

The disciples are so obviously failures at being disciples of Jesus.

It's Easter and they don't even know it. As far as they know Jesus is dead and buried. The shepherd has been struck down and the sheep have scattered.

They should have believed the witnesses. Peter and the beloved disciple have been to the empty tomb. They have told the disciples what they have seen. Mary Magdalene has told them she has seen the Lord. They should have believed, but they didn't.

They have nothing to offer as the church - no vision, no energy, no courage, no conviction.

The Easter Evening Church is a closed system, locked in its own little room for its own security. At least that way it will be safe. Maybe in that moment there is a temptation for the Easter evening church to live the rest of its life on the memory of its past. They can just stay there in that locked room, exchanging memories of the dead Jesus and reminiscing about the days when they used to be a much larger crowd.

And yet, in spite of their failure and disbelief and fearfulness, Jesus still comes to them.

He comes to them with comfort. Peace be with you. It's me. I am alive. You want to see? Then see. You need to touch? then touch.

Perhaps there was comfort for the disciples in realising too that the risen Jesus hasn't come to chastise them or condemn them after their betrayal, denial and desertion.

But as well as bringing them peace, Jesus also comes to them with a commission.

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Open the doors. Leave the building.

He **sent** them to continue his work of love and healing and forgiveness, and to go and tell the good news to the world.

And then come the most overlooked words in the Easter story - Jesus breathed on them. Just as God breathed the breath of life into the nostrils of the first human and into the dry bones of Ezekiel, creating new life in the midst of death, so the Risen Christ breathed on his disciples and gave them new life. An extraordinary act of creation. The Church that has taken the good news of Christ to the ends of the earth was born in that moment.

The greatest evidence for the truth of the resurrection to this day is a small church that met the risen Jesus in its midst, heard his word of peace, received his Spirit, and allowed itself to be sent as messengers of his forgiveness.

That kind of transformation still happens today, and that sort of evidence is still given today, whenever a group of people, large or small, does the same.

But what about right now?

Well, Jesus still comes to stand among us, even though we can't gather as the Church.

He tells us not to be fearful, not to be without hope, because he has conquered and is with us.

He breathes his Spirit on us and commissions us to proclaim the good news of Christ's death and resurrection to all who will listen.

I guess we'll learn that an Easter church is not necessarily a frenetically busy church, but a church brimming over with joy and hope and faith and love. We can still be that kind of church in our own homes and via social media, and for our limited number of face to face contacts.

## Prayer of the Faithful

*No one who approaches the Lord in humble faith will ever be turned away. Therefore we have the courage to offer him our prayers.*

Let us pray for the Church: that she may proclaim with joy the Easter message of hope for the world.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Let us pray that Jesus, who met his apostles with the greeting of peace, may turn the hearts of world leaders to acts of justice that will lead to peace in the world.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Let us pray that we may obtain the blessing of those who believe without seeing Jesus, as we proclaim him to be our Lord and our God.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Let us pray that Jesus, who gave his apostles the power to forgive sins, may in his divine mercy renew and purify us with all the cleansing power of his paschal sacrifice.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Let us pray for those who are suffering, and whose faith is being tested – that through Jesus they may emerge stronger and happier in his service.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Let us pray for the faithful departed, especially **Bridgie Piercy, Brian Kelly, Aloysius McCooey, Doreen Winstone, Vincenzo Terranova** and **Barbara Mulhall**, who have died recently: that through the resurrection of Jesus they may be brought into the inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading in heaven.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Let us lift our hearts in prayer to the Father in a moment of silence.

*Silence.*

*Lord God, the source of truth and love, keep us faithful to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, united in prayer and the breaking of bread, and one in joy and simplicity of heart, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*