

Second Sunday of Easter – 2021 B

Peace. How our hearts long for peace of mind, peace that is borne of hope that our sufferings and struggles will pass and end in joy, peace that is so elusive in our unsettled world, especially now. Think for a moment of the anxieties, questions, uncertainties, even doubts that have visited you these past months; and ***then hear again those very first words of the Risen Jesus: “Peace be with you.”*** Because the same Christ is with us today, the same gift is offered in our weariness and troubles: Peace.

Take a moment to look at your hands. In our parishes, in every parish, some hands are young and small; others worn and calloused. Some wear wedding rings; others have rings of religious profession; and some are still searching for God’s path in their lives. Some hands are neatly groomed with polished nails; others, like my dad’s were, are stained with grease and oil, or like my mom’s, worn from years of nursing and dishes and laundry. Some are missing fingers or bent with arthritis or carrying canes; others are still strong and limber. ***All of those hands testify silently to the labors of God’s people, the Works of Mercy*** – on field and farm; in kitchen and laundry room; in classrooms and hospitals; in offices and workplaces; by cradles and sickbeds. They witness to time spent with loved ones and those in need; time spent in prayer and intercession, hands folded in concentration on the things of God or passing Rosary beads through them, hands holding the Scriptures or tattered prayer books. Perhaps even deeper than these physical signs of the labors of love that make up our lives, there are wounds of the heart, not as visible but often more lasting: disappointments, broken promises, losses of loved ones, expectations not met, plans never to be fulfilled, hopes that seem empty. ***So many hands, of all ages, held in prayer and love for the same Christ, drawn into Communion by Him to become one Body.***

John tells us when the disciples were unsure that Easter night, Jesus convinced them by showing them His scars ... those wounds in hands and feet and side that bore silent witness to His sacrifice on the Cross.

Love is seen to be real when it is willing to be wounded on behalf of another. Those scars allowed the

Eleven to know the risen Jesus and to receive the Holy Spirit. Those wounds are the enduring witness that God's mercy revealed in Jesus at the Cross is stronger than hatred, stronger than sin, stronger even than death. ***For us too, our scars remain*** – visible evidence that we have taken up our share in the Lord's cross, the cost of love, and invested ourselves in the work of the Gospel – service, love, faithfulness. Like Jesus, we too can bear our scars as proof of God's faithfulness ... the divine and merciful love that never abandons us but brings us through death to new life.

When Jesus invited Thomas in his doubt: "Put your hand into My side" – He pointed to the wound opened by the soldier's lance. ***And we know from the Gospel that this wound led to His heart***, where blood and water poured out, suggesting the new life brought by Baptism and nourished by the Eucharist, as reflected in the Divine Mercy image seen in St. Faustina's vision. The doubt of Thomas is proverbial, but we must not forget that his skepticism ended in the beautiful expression of ***faith***: "My Lord and my God!"

The pandemic and the many struggles in the last 16 months and more have ***inspired sacrifices for others that have been a powerful sign of that divine love still at work among us***. When our own integrity in faith and service makes the Gospel seem possible to those who are searching for God, we are fulfilling what we pray: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." True works of mercy will always cost us something, and they will change us, taking the risk even to be wounded on behalf of another. Even the Lord still bears His scars, and they led us to His heart filled with mercy. That is how we know it is really Jesus, Who continues to say to His Church: ***"As the Father has sent me, so I send you."***