

April 19, 2020: Second Sunday of Easter (Or of Divine Mercy)

First Reading: Acts 2.42-47

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 118.2-4, 13-15, 22-24(R. 1)

Second Reading: 1 Peter 1.3-9

Gospel: John 20.19-31

Homily by Fr. Robert Weaver

“When do you think things will get back to normal?” This question is likely on many people’s minds these days as we have been in “lockdown mode” for several weeks now in order to reduce the rate of COVID-19 cases. And this “lockdown” has brought about many changes in our lives.

One major change has been the emphasis on physical distancing. As you know, when we are outside we are not to gather into groups, and if we do see other people then we are to keep several feet away from them. While this might seem to lead to social isolation, in other ways this physical distancing can actually promote closeness between people.

For example, the other morning I was out for a run and as I came down a hill, I saw a man ahead of me. As we drew near to one another, we both veered in the other direction and created more physical distance between us but as we did this, we exchanged a friendly greeting.

I was struck by how truly unique this situation was. Through this act of physical avoidance, the other man and I were essentially communicating to one another, “Hey, let’s help each other stay healthy.” And that’s a big part of what this lockdown is about – helping each other stay healthy. We are putting into practice what the Church refers to as *solidarity*, or “recogni[z]ing others as our brothers and sisters and actively working for their good” (see: <https://caritas.org.nz/catholic-social-teaching/solidarity>).

Our first reading today, taken from the Acts of the Apostles, refers to this important principle of honoring others and working for their good. In this reading we get a glimpse into the life of the early Church right after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Many converted to Christ at this time and we hear today that “[t]hey devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (see: MRE, Pitre, p. 9).

Amazing! This one sentence outlines the four essential characteristics of the newly formed Catholic-Christian Church in Jerusalem: the believers adhered to the **teaching of the Apostles**, they showed **fellowship** by helping each other, they broke bread or celebrated the **Eucharist**, and they **prayed** together (see Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, p. 212).

Let’s consider the second characteristic - fellowship, or working for the good of others. This has been a key dimension of the Church right from the beginning and I know that fellowship is very much alive in our parishes. And our desire to practice true fellowship is nourished by our participation in those other characteristics of the Church, that is, through our prayer lives, our celebration of the Eucharist, and by our devotion to the Apostles’ teaching.

So, what does this mean - *devotion to the Apostles’ teaching*? Much could be said about this but it involves actively receiving and being transformed by the saving truths that Jesus revealed to his apostles, and the saving truths that the apostles handed down to their successors and that are still with us today.

For example, Peter, the leader of the apostles, provided the first apostolic teaching at Pentecost, as he proclaimed to the crowd the saving truth of Jesus’ Death and Resurrection. And this great proclamation is repeated in speeches throughout the Acts of the Apostles. (See: Lector Workbook, p. 166.)

Another way to describe the saving truths such as the Death and Resurrection of Jesus is the word *dogma*. Dogma is a core element of Church teaching that has been revealed by God and is true for eternity

(see: <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/jimmy-akin/what-are-dogma-doctrine-and-theology>).

You will notice that Fr. Thom, Fr. Tony, Deacon Steve and I are all wearing white vestments today - this is in keeping with the Church's liturgical rules for the Easter season. But this rule is not dogma. Rather, it is a Church discipline or regulation that could change over time. The saving Death and Resurrection of Jesus does not change, however. As dogma, it will always be true. It is believed by the faithful everywhere and always, and we thank God for this!

Another dogma is that there is one, true God and in God there are three Persons; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The reality of Jesus being both truly God and truly human is also dogma. Other dogmas are that Mary was conceived without original sin and that she was assumed body and soul into heaven following her earthly life.

(See: <https://www.theworkofgod.org/dogmas.htm>.)

Being devoted to these Apostolic teachings, these dogmas, goes beyond believing in them. As I mentioned before, it also involves actively receiving them and being transformed by them. For instance, in the Apostles Creed we say that "...on the third day...[Jesus] rose again from the dead."

This is great that we express our belief in this way but it is important that we also incorporate the Resurrection into our spiritual lives. In other words, we should prayerfully contemplate this saving event with our minds and hearts. By doing this we will be drawn into a deeper union with God and with others.

A great way to cultivate prayerful contemplation is the Scriptural Rosary. Today, being the 2nd Sunday of Easter, is also Divine Mercy Sunday, which is inspired by the apparitions of Jesus to a Polish nun

named Faustina Kowalska. St. Faustina had a strong devotion to the Rosary, and so it is most fitting that we consider the Rosary today.

(See: <https://www.thedivinemercy.org/articles/faustina-champion-rosary>.)

Like the traditional Rosary, the Scriptural Rosary focuses on the joyful, sorrowful, luminous and glorious mysteries and it includes the Our Father and Hail Mary prayers. But what is unique about the Scriptural Rosary is that it combines Scripture and other spiritual verses with these prayers.

For instance, the first glorious mystery is the Resurrection. And between each Hail Mary there is a Scripture verse which pertains to this dogma. So, as you go through this mystery you read the words of an angel to the women gathered at Jesus' empty tomb: **“I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here”** (Mt. 28, 5, 6). This is followed by praying a Hail Mary.

Next, you read **“He has risen from the dead. Come and see the place where he lay”** (Lk 24:6; Mt. 28:6, 7). Then, another Hail Mary. Eventually you read the words of Jesus himself, who said, **“I am the resurrection and the life. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies, he will live”** (Jn 11:25). Again, this is followed by a Hail Mary.

I find this rhythmic process of reading Scripture followed by praying a Hail Mary very uplifting, as Mary leads me closer to Jesus who blesses me with greater love and devotion to his Resurrection. In this way, I become more aware that the Scripture passages are alive; they are powerful descriptions of a dogma we are called not only to accept, but to devote our lives to. I believe the Scriptural Rosary can draw us into rich and prayerful contemplation of the saving mysteries of our Faith.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the Mother of God but she is our spiritual mother as well, and she so much desires to lead us closer to her son Jesus. And let us recall the prayer of Jesus found in John's Gospel account, as Our Lord said **“...that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you...”** (17:21).

Our being “one” includes a shared devotion to sacred dogma. Praying even part of the Scriptural Rosary can help nourish this devotion and bring us closer to Jesus and to each other. The Scriptural Rosary can prompt us to continually marvel at the infinite brilliance and greatness of God, and to repeat those magnificent words we hear today from Thomas: “My Lord and my God!”