

# SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

## St. John 20:19-31

This Sunday, the eighth day of the Easter Octave, is known by a number of names. At times it was called “Low Sunday” meaning that the Sunday before, which was Easter Sunday, was the “high” day. At other times it has been called “Quasimodo Sunday” taken from the Latin words of the introit or entrance antiphon of the Mass, which in English translates to “Like newborn infants” (see *Lt. 2:2*). It is also called *Dominica in albis* or “White Sunday”, referring to the white robes worn by those newly Baptised and received into the Church. Since the year *A.D.* 2000, this Sunday is also known as “Divine Mercy Sunday”, when Pope St. John Paul II declared it be a universal day of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Christ and His Divine Mercy as made known to St. Maria Faustina Kowalska. According to the diary of St. Faustina, Our Lord made known to her that, “On [this] day the very depths of My tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fount of My mercy. The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment. On that day all the divine floodgates through which grace flow are opened. Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet. My mercy is so great that no mind, be it of man or of angel, will be able to fathom it throughout all eternity” (Diary of St. Faustina, *n.* 699).

But do we understand what divine mercy really is? The tragedy is that whilst God’s mercy is freely offered to all who seek it, many, if not most, people treat mercy more as a license to do whatever they want as long as they have basically good intentions, to treat mercy as a “get out of hell free” card, as a way to make excuses for sin. It is because of this that when Our Lord revealed the devotion of Divine Mercy to St. Faustina He also spoke of hell and gave her

several visions. While He said that He “wants souls to come to know Him first as King of mercy” (*Diary, n. 378*), He also said that we must take advantage of—not take for granted—that divine gift.

Our Lord said to her, “If my death has not convinced you of my love, what will? [Some] use my graces to offend me... They do not wish to hear my call [to mercy], but proceed into the abyss of hell... God though I am, I cannot help such a soul because it scorns me; having a free will, it can spurn me or love me” (*Diary, n. 580*).

After this, St. Faustina was shown a vision of hell and witnessed the particular sufferings of those there and she wrote, “I am writing this at the command of God, so that no soul may find an excuse by saying there is no hell, or that nobody has ever been there, and so no one can say what it is like. I, Sister Faustina, by the order of God, have visited the abysses of hell so that I might tell souls about it and testify to its existence.” She added, “Most of the souls there are those who disbelieved that there is a hell” (*Diary, n. 742*).

So what, exactly, is mercy? The mercy of God—divine mercy—is the reason why you and I can face up to our sin and accept full responsibility for what we have done. It is because God is merciful that we can give ourselves over completely to Him, with all the evil that we have done. We can accept whatever punishment He says is just and we can take responsibility for our mistakes because we have the hope that we will be saved.

Unfortunately, the popular take on divine mercy seems to be more about finding excuses for our failure to live up to the moral standard and to soothe our consciences by saying, “I am only human, so you can’t really blame me”. Divine mercy now seems to be more about how I can’t be blamed.

The Church has just prayed the long penitential season of Lent and celebrated the mysteries of salvation through the Triduum—the three days of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. We have been taken into the depths of human weakness and the seen the ugliness of sin, and we have been

shown the glory that awaits us if we hold fast and persevere in faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ. The truth of the human condition has been played out over these three days. The liturgies have demanded that we know sorrow for our sins and seek to make penance. They strip us of our excuses and self-deception. They demand that we face up to our sinfulness and own up to our sins and to take full responsibility. Just as St. Peter denied Our Lord three times, so Our Lord gave him three chances to repent and to declare his love for Him (see *Jn.* 21:15-17). St. Peter had to take responsibility for what he had done, and when he did, Our Lord showed him His mercy. Just as for St. Peter, nowhere do these liturgies give us any reason to claim that our sins are really not all our fault.<sup>1</sup>

What these liturgies do, however, is reveal to us the mercy of almighty God and grant to us the possibility of being responsible for what we do, to be accountable, to accept blame and to trust in the judgment of God. It does this because it shows us that what divine mercy really is, and that is the grace to be humble and to know that we can trust in God. This is what real freedom looks like. It is not making excuses or claiming that an all-loving God will never punish me for what I have done. To think this way is to spit in the face of Our Lord and to take for granted all that He endured for us because of our sins.

Every one of our sins, every act and thought of evil we have committed, every time we have turned from God is one more nail in His holy body which pierces Him to the Cross. Yet every one of our acts of true sorrow for our sins, every time we take responsibility for what we have done and say that it really is my fault, we can help to remove those nails from His body. Because by His mercy He has given us the chance to look on Him and say, "I did that," and so to give Him the chance to say, as He did to St. Dismas, the good thief, "today you will be with me in Paradise" (*Lk.* 23:42-43).

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<sup>1</sup> Merrick, James R.A., "Is There Really Hope for Judas?", *Crisis Magazine*, 3 April 2024  
([crisismagazine.com/opinion/is-there-really-hope-for-judas](https://crisismagazine.com/opinion/is-there-really-hope-for-judas))

If you want to stand before God then get down on your knees. Confess your sins, take responsibility for what you have done, and trust yourself to His divine judgment so that you will know His divine mercy.