

2019 - DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

The Apostle called Thomas was a tough, no-nonsense fisherman. And by Thursday of the week we now call “Holy Week” he had reached boiling point with Jesus.

When at the Last Supper Jesus had said: “I will come again and will take you to myself so that where I am, there you may be also. You know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas exploded. As far as he was concerned, Jesus was, once again, taking far too much for granted. So Thomas burst out: “Lord we do NOT know where you are going, so HOW can we know the way?”

These were the words of a frustrated and angry man.

When I did Stage II Calculus at University I had exactly the same sense of frustration. The pennies weren’t dropping. It was all far too hard for me, too ethereal. And I got angrier and angrier with the lecturer for presuming far too much knowledge in me.

So too with Thomas. He liked things to be simple and clear. Jesus had become far too mystical, too other-worldly, for his liking.

Later in the same evening Thomas had accompanied Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane with the other Apostles. He had seen Jesus arrested and had escaped from possible arrest himself by fleeing into the night. He had stayed hidden with friends in Jerusalem during the horror of Good Friday and hadn’t made any effort to re-establish contact with Peter and the rest of the Apostles for quite a few days.

When Thomas finally linked up with them, he wouldn’t have a bar of their story that Jesus had risen from the dead. Thomas hated humbug. It all sounded so far-fetched- they were just prolonging the agony; failing to admit that the dream was over. He told them all: “Unless I can actually touch the wounds in His hands and side, I will not believe.”

A few days later Jesus once again appeared to the Apostles. And this time Thomas was present. Jesus knew of Thomas’s challenge and invited his hard-headed apostle to touch the wounds of His crucifixion.

Thomas had had a week to work out the implications of what it meant if Jesus had risen from the dead. Human beings don’t rise from the dead. Thomas didn’t bother about theological abstractions. He simply knelt before Jesus and said, “You are my Lord, and my God.”

And we can be assured that our Merciful Lord lifted Thomas to his feet and embraced him with love.

Thank-you, Thomas, you tough-minded fisherman, for being like us. Like you, we, too, can have our doubts about Jesus and sometimes they afflict us horrendously. Sometimes our doubts are innocent enough: like the doubts of teenagers questioning their faith; simply seeking a deeper understanding and not really rebelling at all. But sometimes our doubts are crippling. If, for example, our spouse dies a painful death or one of our children is abused, or if our marriage falls apart or fellow Catholics: people we trusted; betray us in business. We are wounded and inevitably ask angry questions about the existence of a God of Love.

At such times of intense crisis we can only do one thing: hang tenaciously onto our core belief that Jesus is God and that His Love for us is as limitless as the Universe.

This is the essence of the devotion we celebrate today: The Divine Mercy; focussed as it is on the infinity of God's Love.

A priest friend once spoke to me of a year when he had worked on an Island in the middle of the Brahmaputra River in North East India. What captured my imagination was his comment that the River flowing around the Island is so wide that you cannot see either bank of the River from either shore of the Island.

And it struck me that the rivers of love, powered by the Holy Spirit, which flow from the Father to Jesus and from Jesus to the Father are as immense as the Brahmaputra River. And that we are like droplets of water in the vast river of love flowing from Jesus to the Father.

In a series of visions to a Polish nun, Sister Saint Faustina, in the 1930's, Jesus commissioned the Saint to paint the picture we today venerate. Jesus said to her: "My mercy is so great that no mind, be it of man or of angel, will be able to fathom it throughout all eternity. Everything that exists has come from the depths of My most tender mercy."

On the Divine Mercy image we see two rays of light- one red and the other white- shining forth from Jesus' heart illuminating the world. The red ray symbolizes the sacrifice of the Cross and the gift of the Eucharist. The white ray represents the waters of Baptism and the gifting to us of the Holy Spirit: all wondrous gifts to mankind; all manifestations of Jesus' Divine Mercy.

Today in New Zealand there are at least two million doubting Thomases- people who cast doubt on the existence of God and totally reject the divinity of Jesus. How can we encourage these people to bravely take the plunge and bathe in the river of God's limitless love?

Inspired by the Risen Christ, We are to be as He was. He did not condemn Thomas for his doubting. He reached out to him in love.

Yes, like the Risen Christ we are to be people of Joy and People of Love: giving to our brothers and sisters the love and mercy they know they do not deserve but nevertheless deeply crave for. We are to be channels of Divine Mercy.