

April 23, 2006
Divine Mercy Sunday
Fr. Larry Richards

Today is Divine Mercy Sunday, as we said and if you listen to the gospel – the gospel starts off with them all huddled around – the apostles – and they are in fear! And it says they are in fear of the Jews. But I think there is a little bit more to it! They are in fear because they heard that Jesus was alive. Now why would they be afraid? Well because every one of them betrayed Jesus! Everyone single one of them there left Jesus alone in that garden. Everyone! Everyone left – everyone! And so now He is alive, and they know that they are going to have to deal with Him. So, try to get in the mindset! They trusted in His love, but they were also unsure about how that was going to figure itself out! And so when Jesus comes and stands in their midst, instead of saying “boy, you people let me down...” He said “Peace be with You.” Peace be with you. The first thing out of His mouth to these people who betrayed Him was not justice, it was not “now you are going to pay” it was not “I told you, and I’m showing you...” it was “Peace.” And so the first thing we have to do on this Divine Mercy Sunday is know that the first thing Christ wants to give us is Peace – He is not out to get us. He’ll let us make our own decisions, and He’ll let our decisions separate us from Him for all eternity, but, if we go to Him and we are sorry, the only thing He wants to do is bring us peace and mercy! And so, the first thing we are called to do is trust that God is not out to get us – God is out to love us! Ok? Simple. The second thing is now deal with Thomas! Now, Thomas – thanks be to God for Thomas – because he was the doubter. Anybody who has any grain of salt inside of them of faith is going to have a little bit of doubt inside of us. You know, we will be doubting all kinds of stuff! You know they have the Judas books that have come up, and the gospel of Judas in the DaVinci Code, and all these people that think they are real smart. They read these books and they go “Oh wow” and it creates doubt! Huh! But who was the first one that created doubt, way in the beginning, Genesis, Chapter 3...the DEVIL! The devil always is the one that gets in there and says “oh, was He really alive, was Jesus really God...” He creates it by asking the question. And so, we are all there in some way. And so what Jesus does – and now again, Thomas said “I’m not going to believe it unless I can take my hand and put it in His side.” A week later, Jesus shows up again! And he doesn’t say “ok, you little pagan Thomas.” He doesn’t start yelling at him – He says “Peace be with you.” Again, He starts with peace. Even to Thomas, who refused to believe - the God of mercy first of all gives mercy in the form of peace. Then He says “Come here, Thomas – give me your hand.” And He takes his hand and he puts it into the wound of Jesus’ side. And how many times in my own prayer life and in your own prayer life, I would imagine, that if we are really there, Jesus sits there and calls you and me by name and He says “come here.” And He takes and He says “I want you to take your hand and I want you to put it in there.” Have you ever put your hand in the side of Christ? Have you ever felt the blood and the water come down to your hand? Have you ever received that mercy? Because that is what He is calling for you and me to do today - to put our hand into His side as Thomas did and to receive and experience this mercy. To put our hand into His side and let Him say “this is what it cost me to love you.” When you put your hand in His side, you will come to know what it cost Jesus to love you – it

cost Him His life. What does it cost you to love Jesus? “Oh, I have to go to church once a week, if I feel like it, I’ll do it. You know, don’t expect much more than that from me, God.” Well, look what He does for you and me. And so, the first thing He wants to do is not yell and scream, but to say “Peace, come here. Do you see what I have done for you?” And He wants us first of all to receive His mercy, to receive His peace, to let the blood and water flow out of His side – it comes out of there to wash over you – to cleanse you. The first thing you and I have to do is fully receive that. But then, isn’t it interesting, right after He does this, what does He do with the twelve? He commissions them to go out and to forgive others their sins. Now God says “after you have received mercy – you don’t deserve it, but I gave you mercy - now, this is what I want you to do – receive the Holy Spirit. Those whose sins you forgive are forgiven, those whose sins you do not forgive, they are not forgiven.” And so He says “I want you now to go out and be instruments of mercy.” So, this is the next part! That after we trust in His mercy – we know He is going to give it to us – then what we do is we take that one hand and keep it in the side of Christ, and then we take the other hand and we give it to all those people who have hurt us! And we let the mercy of God – the blood and water come from one side out the other and then we become instruments of mercy! We become the instrument through the mercy of God. That is the only way to truly receive the mercy, because if you and I will not extend this other hand, it doesn’t even come into us. We must extend the other hand in mercy to others! And again, as you have heard me quote 1,000 times and let me quote it again – C.S. Lewis says “If we do not forgive others, we will be damned.” It is that simple! If you refuse to forgive another, you are going to hell! Forever! Like hell – you are going to burn, you are going to feel pain – and it is never going to get better! Don’t you love me, on the week after Easter when we get this mercy – the pastor tells you that you are going to hell! Yes, I mean it! If you refuse to forgive another human being, the mercy of God cannot come upon you! So isn’t it amazing how people do that? “Well, that person doesn’t deserve it – I deserve it” but he doesn’t or she doesn’t because “you don’t know what they did to me.” And God says – what? Matthew, Chapter 5 – we will say the Our Father today, will we not? When we say the Our Father, it says “and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us...” And then, in case you didn’t get it, Jesus reminds us right after in Matthew – “if you forgive others, then your Father will forgive you, if you do not forgive others, neither will the Father forgive you.” Now, the people who hurt us the most are who? Our family, usually, it’s the truth. You know, our wife hurt us, our husband hurt us, our son hurt us, our father hurt us, our brother hurt us, our sister hurt us... whatever it happens to be! And we sit there and we have these little things – we have these notches – “that one hurt me, that one hurt me – they’re going to get theirs!” That is not a follower of Jesus Christ! Not even close! Not even close! When God looks at you and me today on Divine Mercy Sunday, if you cannot forgive people- I can’t forgive people – I’m a petty person sometimes! You know, yesterday I was with a funeral director and I brought up what another funeral director did to me eight years ago and I said “that miserable son of a so and so hasn’t been in my church...” And I’m thinking that’s really nice for your pastor to talk that way! I’m petty! You see, it is in giving that we receive – it is in giving that we receive, which means that if I put out my hand, that means that the mercy of God must go through me, which means it stops at me! It means that it is inside of me too. And as I give mercy, I receive mercy! You see, that is the key! If you and I want to receive mercy, we have to give it! It is that

simple! So, today the call is for us to receive the mercy of God and reach out our hands. So, if there is someone you haven't been able to forgive – for whatever reason – say “Jesus, I can't, it is not possible for me...” And He says “I know, let me do it through you. Put your hand in my side, and extend your other hand to that person.” Spiritually – you could do it now. Spiritually, put out your hand to that other person. Don't do it physically – spiritually. And let the blood of Christ flow through you and over that person. And then you receive mercy and you give mercy. Now, some of you, as you are looking at me, or I can tell as I look at you, don't buy this at all! You don't buy it! You sit there and think “I'm not going to forgive anybody, and I don't think I am going to hell!” I'm telling you, you will go to hell if you do not forgive other people! Everybody – doesn't matter what they did to you – you **MUST** forgive them. You **MUST** – or you will not be with God forever. So, the choice today is yours – go to heaven – or go to hell. You decide whether you give mercy, receive mercy, or whether you stop mercy. And if you stop mercy by refusing to give it – then God will say “I desire to give you mercy, but you refuse it, because you refuse to be my instrument of mercy of others.” When Jesus appeared to Faustina, He wept, because so many people refused His mercy. And the way they refuse it, is they won't give it to another. So today Jesus wants to give you eternal life. He wants to give you everything. He wants to give you peace. He wants to give you mercy. So, accept it, or reject it. But you determine your eternity. Got it? Get it? Good! May each of you know His love today and forever. Amen.