

2nd Sunday of Easter (C)
St. Athanasius Parish
April 2,3, 2016

The story of Thomas today is certain to grab our attentions. It is a powerful story, and one we remember from year to year. We might even be happy to learn that one of Jesus' own struggles with the idea of resurrection just as we may. But we must not let this incident of Thomas blind us to the earlier words in today's gospel. Even with the doors locked, Jesus is able to enter, and standing in the midst of the twelve and some of the women, Jesus shows them His hands and his side and says to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven; whose sins you retain are retained." These are foundational words for the mercy of God shared with us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is also from these words, and references in the First Scripture of large numbers of people being healed, and how the one who holds the keys to God's power over death and the netherworld uses this power on our behalf, that we call this 2nd Sunday of Easter Divine Mercy Sunday.

As we gather for Mass these weeks of Easter, the Church helps us adjust to the resurrection of Jesus. The Church helps us make the transition from Jesus of Nazareth to Jesus the Christ.

One of our fundamental beliefs as disciples of Jesus is that we are not left completely alone after someone's death. God does not abandon us when loved ones die. Those who die do not leave us utterly abandoned. We are connected to them by a spiritual presence. We believe this, and the Church gives us stories of how this is true, how this is real. A primary way the Church does this is through mercy both that of God and of others. In fact, it will be difficult to believe in God's mercy if no one here on earth shows us mercy. (An unmerciful parent makes it all but impossible to believe in God's mercy, and thus also God's presence.) Yet God's mercy is surely more clear and more dependable.

I personally find that these two realities God's mercy and God's presence ... are like two sides of the same coin. I must believe in God's presence before I ever think of asking for God's mercy, yet without God's mercy shown to me from time to time, I most likely will not believe and trust in God's presence. Forced to put one side of the coin ahead of the other, however, I would opt for God's mercy. I say this because that is how I experience it. Mercy can be very concrete forgiveness in confession, someone freeing me from a mistake, from some oversight, from some misjudgment or unkind word to a person those things happen, you know, when you pastor hundreds of people, and when you serve as Vicar for 10 years. And, probably one of the most clear ways I have known God's mercy is how so many things in my life have turned out as well as they have. As I look back over all my years of priesthood, all those years of teaching, and the same number of years as a pastor, the fact that things have turned out

so positively is truly a blessing from God. It is not that I have earned or deserved any of this. God himself knows THAT part of my life! In fact, just earlier this week, I was thinking how really pretty happy I am being here. How could I have known about these later years of my life even three years ago. With these many signs of God's mercy

forgiveness

God's oversight on my behalf

abundant blessing

I just know that God is present to me.

If you don't know where to start in this transition from Jesus of Nazareth to Jesus the Christ, try mercy extend it to someone ask for it from God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is amazing!