

2nd Sunday of Easter
April 11, 2010
“Building a Church”

Today we celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday, the name Pope John Paul II gave to this 2nd Sunday of Easter, not too many years ago.

In the opening prayer of today’s Mass, we address God as the God of Mercy.

And then the Scripture readings we have just listened to, echo this theme.

The Apostles acted in the name of Jesus when they showed mercy to the sick and troubled who were brought to them.

In the psalm response, we hear repeated the phrase; “God’s mercy endures forever.”

In the Gospel, Jesus gives to the Apostles the power to forgive sins, showing again the enduring mercy that God has for those who are sorry for their sins.

All of these manifestations of mercy are the Lord’s way of beginning to build the Church that would continue His saving work, His mission, here on earth.

In fact, over the next weeks, until Pentecost, we’ll track and recall the progress He takes us through to the moment when it’s right for the Holy Spirit to come and give birth to this new Church.

But for today, let’s focus especially on Jesus giving to the Apostles the ability and power to forgive sins.

That is just so immensely fundamental to holding together any community of human beings, that there’s hardly anything else to compare it to.

Any organization of humans is going to have its imperfections, by definition, because we humans are imperfect: always have been, are now, and always will be.

Try, as we daily do, to strive for perfection, just as the Father is, because the Bible calls us to do that, we know that there will always be human faults and failings.

And any smartly organized community of humans will have built into its by-laws, constitution, or whatever, spells out its rules, some means of reconciliation for a member who falls off the track of progress and flounders on the wayside.

Whether it’s government on the local, state, or federal level, or even just a social organization we may belong to, the wisdom of the founders will always provide some means whereby a delinquent wayfarer can get back on the right track with the rest of the community

Jesus recognized this as being very much the case with His new Church, so much so that it was one of the very first things He put in place: the chance for anyone to be reconciled through the power to forgive sins.

Now, you could say: “why can’t we just tell God we’re sorry in our hearts, and really try to improve ourselves, and just get on with life, without having to go to confession?”

Well, we can and should have that contrite attitude and prayer to God, especially everyday when we say the Act of Contrition, either at Mass or before going to sleep.

But think about all the other human groups we’re a part of.

When we do something wrong, or even just make a simple mistake, we can’t just say: “oops!” and then trot along as if nothing happened. No.

If we did that, people around us would no longer trust us.

We would lose the respect of others because we would appear not to care about the betterment and welfare of the rest and the community as a whole.

And other people wouldn’t want to work with us or even be with us if we didn’t at least own-up to our mistakes and show some sign of trying to become better.

So, it’s the same in being reconciled to God and His Church through this power to forgive sins.

It’s like amnesty: faults and failings are forgiven and forgotten.

That’s why confession as a sacrament is now called the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

It’s a beautiful word.

It’s a positive, healthy experience.

And it goes along with repentance, and resurrection: the 3 spiritual “R’s” that too often today our culture forgets about, because so many are out for somebody else’s blood - somebody always has to pay for whatever evil or suffering may befall us.

Repentance, reconciliation, and then resurrection: they are what keep any group of humans, whether secular or sacred, together, and on the recovery road of the future.

And it most certainly applies to the Church, first and foremost.

Thank you, and God bless you.