

Sermon for the Octave of Easter 2019

Dearly Beloved,

Today we celebrate the octave day of Easter, the eighth day of Christ's resurrection. God had revealed to the Jewish people that they were to celebrate all the major feasts over the course of eight days, with the eighth day being as festive as the first and manifesting the joy of the chosen people. Being the fulfillment of the Jewish nation and the true Israel, we continue that tradition in the Church, and so celebrate today with as much solemnity and joy as Easter, for at this canonry, there is no such thing as low Sunday. But our marking of the eighth day is not merely due to Tradition; it is also a sign of our entering into eternity. The Son of God opened the gates for us in His rising from the dead, and today we enter into His rest through the action of the liturgy.

Today's Mass goes by many names: Quasimodo, due to the first word of the Introit, taken from the first letter of St. Peter; *Dominica in Albis*, for the newly baptized would last wear their white garments today before joining the ranks of the other laity; and in more recent years, Divine Mercy Sunday. Yet all the traditions, both East and West, proclaim the Gospel of doubting Thomas, for it happened on this day some two thousand years ago, and it was surely due to the Gospel's mention of Christ's life-giving wounds that caused this day to be associated with the devotion to Divine Mercy.

As we just heard and as we know, St. Thomas was not with the other apostles on Easter Sunday, and when they told him they had seen the Lord risen from the dead, he said he would not believe unless he could see and touch the wounds of Christ. When the Lord appeared to the apostles again today, Thomas saw those wounds, and professed the divinity of Christ in the immortal words: My Lord and my God. When Mary Magdalene saw the Lord in the garden, she said Rabbi, teacher. But when Thomas saw the wounds, he did not call Him by a human name, but by His divine name. What the risen human nature did not provoke in Mary, the glorious wounds called forth in Thomas: the confession of divine faith.

We too are called to confess the divinity of the Lord in His wounds, but as Jesus says, we confess without seeing them. Yet though we do not see them, we do experience them, for we are His Body, we are his members. We are called to fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ; not that they lack power, but that they lack fullness, for each Christian must suffer in participation with his Master; he must bear the wounds in his own body and soul so that Christ may fill all things and draw all men to Himself.

In each of our lives, we participate in Jesus' wounds in two ways, one is active and the other passive. The active participation is through persecution, when we are calumniated for the sake of Christ, either explicitly, in that others hate us and malign us because we belong to Christ and His Church, or implicitly, because we stand for truth and goodness and so convict the world of its lies and sinfulness. Many of you defend the sanctity of life and of marriage and so are mocked or ridiculed or spoken ill of, and that is to bear the wounds of Christ in your own person.

The way that we can know that such persecution is life-giving is the way in which we respond to our persecutors; the more perfect our love for them, the more perfectly we are wounded in Christ's name and not in our own. We begin by responding with pain of heart: we are sad because we have been maligned and mocked, which is the normal human response; insofar as we do not wish ill on the persecutor, we have done well. When we begin to pray for our persecutor, then we have reached a new stage, and more perfectly participate in Christ. The most perfect level is not only to pray, which we can do even while still bitter, but to weep for the other person's sins and ignorance, asking the Lord to have mercy and forgive them, for they know not what they do.

The reason that such wounds in us correspond to the wounds of Christ and that we share the faith of Thomas in living them out, is that in such an interchange we see more than the human side of it, which is a difference of opinion among persons; we see instead the divine hidden in it, the fulfillment of the beatitudes, the sharing in

the rejection that our Lord experienced because He lived and spoke of the light, but men preferred darkness because their deeds were evil.

Our passive participation in Christ's wounds when we accept the wages of sin, and allow Jesus to heal us through His divine power. St. Paul tells us that the wage of sin is death; that is, sin brought about death, and it is the price we pay for sinning. Many of us experience death in a way that wounds us: the untimely death of a child, or a spouse, a parent or a friend wounds us, and we must live with that wound. Those in the world find cause for rebelling against God, for accusing Him of injustice or cruelty; that is the human way. But we see in the wound the divinity of Christ; the wound of death becomes for us a cause for greater abandonment to the Lord, for crying out to Him, for hope in eternal life, where we shall be reunited.

Sin also has other wages, for other evils have come upon mankind due to sin: the evil of physical and mental illness, and the evil of bad habits that burden us. Illness, whether of the body or of the mind or of the emotions, is a punishment for our sins, either as individuals or as a race, for we inherit many things from Adam by way of original sin, even if we personally do not deserve them. The wound of a prolonged or even lifelong illness is truly a wound; we can either see it as human, and something to be despised, or divine, and thus an opportunity to permit the Lord to work in us. He seems to be silent and to let us suffer, but in fact, His power is shown forth in our weakness, and the wound allows us to know that power, which is a grace and a privilege.

A final wage of sin is sin itself and the way our own sins and the sins of others weigh us down and keep us from making evident spiritual progress. We have separated ourselves from the near occasions of sin and have striven to move forward in holiness, but our emotions remained disturbed, our desires reach out to the wrong things, anger and lust and acedia still rear their ugly heads. But when a bullet is removed, it takes time for the wound to be healed, and in the case of sin, that time of healing is a time to know the mercy of the Lord and a time to grow in humility, without which we cannot be saved. The wound of pride is much more dangerous than the wound of any one individual sin, for pride can corrupt our whole soul and poison all our good works so that what appears to be spiritual progress is in fact self-will instead of divine grace. Instead of willing ourselves to holiness, we show Jesus our wounds so He may heal them; we admit our sickness to the divine physician, just as Thomas admitted the folly of his unbelief by his confession rather than stubbornly clinging to his own human demands and expectations.

In all these cases, we do not touch the wounds of Christ, but allow Him to touch our wounds; we do not hide in His side, but allow Him to hide in ours. And it is in this way that we imitate Thomas, for we allow the wounds that Christ now has in us, His members, to be infused with divinity, to be a cause for professing that Jesus truly is the Son of God. The Lord bore His wounds in pain for three hours, but now they are made glorious; we bear ours in pain for this lifetime, but when they are glorified, this life shall seem like a few hours. And the glory shall be everlasting, for they are wounds that have participated in the wounds of our loving Savior, and so they will come to be not a cause of shame, but a sign of victory. As St. Augustine says, "The love we bear to the blessed martyrs causes us...to desire to see in the heavenly kingdom the marks of the wounds which they received for the name of Christ... For this will not be a deformity, but a mark of honor, and will add luster to their appearance, and a spiritual, if not a bodily beauty." We, too, will be beautiful in heaven; our beauty will come from our wounds: the wounds of death, the wounds of illness, the wounds of sin, which we bore out of love for Christ and with perseverance in faith.

And so, on this blessed day, the eighth day of the Resurrection and our participation in eternity, may we boast, as St. Paul did, of our wounds so that the power of Christ may be manifest in us. Let us, with Thomas, confess the divinity of Christ by entrusting to Him the wounds we suffer. And let us trust in His providence, that each wound is for our good and for the salvation of all those who believe, for in the world to come, there will be no tears, no crying out, no mental anguish, no separation from those whom we love. For this is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.