



***Sunday, April 19, 2020, Octave of Easter and Divine Mercy Sunday***

*You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope.*

This quote of Thomas Merton is very apropos as we experience our global situation and explore the message of our Gospel today. We have come to the octave of Easter and the celebration continues on this Divine Mercy Sunday. John's Gospel scene presents our Risen Lord still bearing the marks of death appearing to His apostles who sequestered themselves in fear and dejection as all hope seemed dashed.

Not unlike what we are doing now in light of our pandemic issues. Globally, people of all faith traditions and those who claim no faith are gathered in their homes, alone and fearful of what may happen next.

Into this setting Jesus comes, a presence that the apostles see with incredulous earth eyes, though we today are called to see with the eyes of faith.

What does Jesus say to them and to us as well: **"Peace be with you"**

He shows the wounds in his Risen Body.

Because they saw ...they believed and rejoiced.

Because we hear ... we believe and rejoice without seeing!

Jesus dispels the apostles' fear once again repeating his gift of Peace. We are invited to absorb His gift in these chaotic times of quarantine and unknowing. His Peace that the world cannot give! We, in our fear and desire to blame, focus on the cause of this plight and desperately want to throw all of our anger and hurt upon those who stole our peace, comfort, and well-being. Normalcy has lost its host and into this confusion Jesus offers us this wonderful gift. Do not be afraid to long for it, receive it, embrace it!

Jesus compassionately/mercifully speaks to those who deserted him, denied him, and left him to suffer and die. How incredible is that! Loving and forgiving—how merciful!

Jesus' mission however was yet to be accomplished:

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

And he breathed on them "Receive the Holy Spirit."

He gives them the commission to be His presence in the world, a presence that was to be loving, healing, merciful and forgiving... the truth that brings new freedom.

I suggest that the main emphasis of this passage is that Jesus breathed on and gave His Spirit, the Holy Spirit who would empower them to continue His mission...a commission given us, as well. Each of us are commissioned to preach by our own lives all that Jesus lived. It is our Baptismal birth-rite to embrace the Resurrection of Jesus...for it is our road to intimacy with God. In and through this relationship that we need to nurture daily, we can be His presence of self-sacrifice at home and to all around us. How gratifying to see outreach everywhere. I am inspired by all who are tending those who are most vulnerable during this pandemic. I was especially touched recently by Mater Dolorosa Passionist Retreat Center who though closed until further notice is working with local communities in a Food Ministry outreach program producing more than 6000 meals per month for seniors of the local communities, to Union Station Homeless Services and St. Francis Center. We also see this local outreach as ordinary people risk their lives to comfort the elderly and

provide much needed health supplies to those infected with the virus. Perhaps the most telling of this faith in action are our first responders who daily risk their own lives and safety to be “Jesus in their midst.” Luke in

our first reading describes service as one of the first acts that the apostles share with converts. We too are called to be creative in how we serve God in and through serving our family, communities and one another at this time. Through the lens of the Risen Jesus, we bring His life, works and teachings alive in our midst.

For us today our faith is not the absence of fear, pain, sorrow or loss; rather, it is the bearing of pain or sorrow in faith. Faith transforms...does not take away the wounds. In faith our flaws are refined and purified, not obliterated. We all have memories of being hurt—of being let down, having hopes dashed. With us today is fear of the unknown. How will we emerge from this surreal global crisis? Can we engage the gift of faith to believe that our God is with us in time of uncertainty? We too have been given the breath of the Holy Spirit through baptism. We too have the power to forgive (release) others (of) their wrongs against us, just as we have the power to keep them and ourselves bound.

We are tangibly aware of breath today, a breath that can convey death. Yet the Spirit breathes life into our being and continues to breathe through us in the ordinary experiences of our life. This is grace – the grace to breathe in and out our God who sustains us and sends us to one another and to our brothers and sisters locally and globally who need God’s Spirit and hope especially at this time.

But there is more to the story today, who was missing when Jesus appeared? *Thomas—so dejected and conflicted by the death of his friend.*

How consoling Jesus is to his beloved Thomas. I thank Thomas who shows me that in my deepest struggles, I just need to be honest with My Lord, My God. There have been and are times in my life and yours, I’m sure, when all I can manage is “Jesus, I believe, help my unbelief.”

We are blessed with our faith community that helps shore up our faith. Our challenge is to cooperate with the faith and life-breath we’ve been given to support each other on the journey. May our social distance be mitigated by spiritual closeness.

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Thomas Merton

Peace,  
Sister Marcia Krause, OP