

As with the celebration of Christmas, the world, or more specifically, the economy – in which we are situated has already turned its attention to Mother’s Day – while we in the Church will still be celebrating Easter for the next six weeks. . . closing out the Easter season with the feast of the Ascension and then the celebration of Pentecost.

On Easter Sunday, St. Paul gave us some very powerful words in his letter to the Colossians. Paul said, “brothers and sisters, IF then you were raised with Christ – seek what is above, not what is of earth.”

IF – being the most important word. . . “If then you were raised with Christ – seek what is above, not what is of earth. . .

So: IF we have entered into the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ.

IF we have turned our lives and hearts over to the power of God’s grace – the same power which raised Jesus from the dead.

IF we have allowed Christ to set us free.

THEN this effects our whole being – much like a little yeast leavens all the dough – to use another image of St. Paul’s.

The death and resurrection of Jesus – the Paschal Mystery – is far more than just a matter of intellectual assent – it’s not just something to be believed. It is a matter of the heart. . . which effects the way we live.

So: IF then you were raised with Christ – then we see things differently, we value things differently, we set our hearts on things differently – we live our lives differently than those around us ---- *we seek what is above, not what is on earth.*

That is why there is a word used many times in our readings during the Easter season – and much more importantly a word lived out as an example in those same readings.

And the word and the example is WITNESS: IF our lives have truly been touched by the power of the resurrection.

If our hearts have indeed been changed.

Then we witness [give testimony, give evidence in our lives] to the power of that change by what we do and say – we give *witness* to the risen Christ!

“The other disciples told Thomas they had seen the Lord.” “The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of their possessions were their own.” “And this is the way we know that we love the children of God – when we love God and obey his commandments.”

The lives of the disciples and those in the early church *had been touched* by the power of the resurrection. Their hearts had been changed. And they witnessed to the power of that change by what they said and did – they gave witness to the risen Lord.

Sunday after Sunday, throughout the Easter season, through our readings of Scripture -- we will be given a way, a challenge, a characteristic of how we can give witness, give testimony, give evidence of our belief in the risen Lord in our lives. And today’s word, challenge, characteristic of our giving witness ---- is MERCY.

Every year since 2000 when Pope John Paul II established the feast, the Second Sunday of Easter has been celebrated as Divine Mercy Sunday. Because, as he said, “From God’s mercy, every other grace flows.”

The image of Divine Mercy, which comes to us from the visionary St. Faustina ---reminds us of the graces that flow from the fountain of mercy found in the heart of Jesus. That mercy – is freely given – and flows out – generously and indiscriminately -- to all people.

Spiritual author, Max Lacado, gives us a sense of this when he writes in his book, Grace for the Moment [Vol. 2, pg 284]:

“Do you really think you haven’t done things that hurt Christ?”

Have you ever been dishonest with or misused gifts he has showered down upon you? That's cheating.

Ever gone to church to be seen --- rather than to see him? That's hypocrisy.

Ever broken a promise you've made to God? That's infidelity.

Don't you deserve to be punished? And yet, here you are. Breathing. Still witnessing sunsets and hearing babies cry. Still watching the seasons change.

There are no lashes on your back or shackles on your feet. Apparently God hasn't kept a list of your wrongs.

Listen up. You have not been *sprinkled* with forgiveness. You have not been *splattered* with a touch of grace. You have not been *dusted* with kindness. You have been immersed in it!

You are submerged in God's mercy. You are but a minnow in the vast ocean of his mercy. *Let it change you!* Be merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful!"

Why is God merciful to us? A story from the Desert Fathers gives us the answer to that one:

An old man was asked by a certain soldier why God loves a penitent person – rather than punish them.

And the old man said, "Tell me, if your cloak were torn, would you throw it away?"

And the soldier said, "No, I would patch it."

The old man said to him, "If you would spare your garment, shall not God have mercy on someone created in his image and likeness?"

God has mercy on us – and upon the whole world -- because God never gives up on us! Even IF a mother could forget her child – God will never forget us!

And if God never gives up on us --- then we should not give up on one another!

So how can we go about showing each other mercy? The Church has long had the answer for that in its traditional teaching of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Pick one – and immerse someone in it:

The corporal works of mercy are:

- Feeding the hungry.
- Giving drink to the thirsty.
- Clothing the naked.
- Giving refuge to the homeless.
- Visiting the sick.
- Setting the oppressed free.
- Burying the dead.

The spiritual works of mercy are:

- Instructing the ignorant.
- Counseling the doubtful.
- Correcting the sinner.
- Bearing wrongs patiently.
- Forgiving offenses willingly.
- Comforting the afflicted.
- Praying for the living and the dead.

IF our lives have truly been touched by the power of the resurrection.

IF our hearts have indeed been changed.

– Then we witness to the power of that change by what we do and say – we give witness to the risen Christ!

This week, let's practice this important virtue of mercy: witnessing to the risen Lord. Our current Holy Father, Pope Francis, calls mercy the "name of God" and believes that mercy changes everything --- that it changes the world. He believes so firmly in this that he has declared a Holy Year dedicated to mercy, beginning on December 8th. Heck, by then, we will be well versed in mercy. Let's become merciful, just as our heavenly Father is merciful.