

Let me begin today by wishing all of you a thoroughly blessed and joy-filled Easter. Today is the last day of our Easter Octave, which I like to refer to as our Easter honeymoon. We can still revel in the events of last weekend and yet we move forward to our long-term relationship with the risen Lord. I hope you all had a chance to be part of our Triduum celebration last week. If you didn't get a chance to be part of our Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil services please make it a priority to get to them next year. One of the things I enjoy about the Triduum celebrations every year is I see both the regulars, who have been here year after year throughout the life of our parish, and always a few new faces. Some are new parishioners, such as our newest full member Austin, who received all the sacraments of initiation at the Vigil, but also and maybe more importantly are the guests that have been invited by family and friends, some of which I know aren't even Catholic. They stand out in my mind the most because I see the surprise and joy on their face as they experience the deep, beautiful, solemn, expression of our faith played out in the passion of our Lord and then the joy of the Resurrection.

You know, we need this to happen on more than just Easter and Christmas. We need to share the joy we have with others: those who may never have experienced Christ in liturgy like this, some who have left the Church or feel it left them, and of course, those who need healing whether it be physical, mental, or spiritual.

What we're talking about here is evangelization. That's kind of an uncomfortable term for us Catholics, isn't it? For one thing, we don't think we are very good at it. Secondly, for most of the last century we thought we were self-sustaining by the fact we had larger families and enough of the children would grow up as active Catholics. But that is no longer the case. If you get the Post Bulletin you might want to checkout paper this weekend. There are several articles about how those old strategies just don't work anymore. People today, young people especially, need a personal connection to find their way into the Church. So how do we share the joy of the risen Christ and the blessings of the Church with others out there? Well, let me propose three ways we can do it. For the most part, they are rather passive.

The first and most important thing we can do is just to let the joy of Easter, the joy of the risen, all loving, and abundantly merciful God shine through us. That's right, I'm suggesting our primary method of sharing the Good News with the rest of the world is to look like we actually have it. Let our joy be so evident, that someone, our neighbor, our co-worker, or just someone you interact with while standing in line at the store actually comments on it. Perhaps they'll ask why we are in such a good mood or maybe inquire what medication we are on because they could use some. That's the opportunity for us to say something about our recent

Triduum and Easter experiences. Maybe we suggest they should consider attending next year or better yet come now to see what a Catholic Mass (at Holy Spirit) is like. You really don't have to say anything more than that. The Holy Spirit will take over at that point. He will either work on them directly or help you figure out what to say next. It's true, we don't have a finished mega-structure, a state of the art theatre, a bowling alley, or a gourmet café to attract. But we have the ultimate meal to offer if one hungers for an intimate, healing, eternal relationship with Jesus.

The second method of evangelization I want to mention is how we carry our crosses. Everyone has a cross to bear or will eventually. Do we carry ours like it is the weight of the world and we have no hope of resurrection? Or do we carry it with the knowledge that God is with us no matter what we must go through? Someone whose joy comes through while carrying their cross is preaching the good news without using words. Those of us who work with the poor, sick, or dying have experienced this when the faith of the person to whom we are ministering shines through joyfully even though they bear overwhelming burdens. That is a powerful method of evangelization.

Now, the last method of evangelization I'm going to suggest is going to seem a little strange. It's offering someone the divine mercy of God before they even "consciously" know they need it. Stay with me on this. Today is Divine Mercy

Sunday and most of you have heard about the Divine Mercy as presented to Saint Sister Faustina in the 1930s in Poland. If you want to dive into something deep and profound about our faith and how God continues to reveal himself in the present, I invite you to spend time exploring this. You won't be disappointed. It will knock your socks off. I would love to tell you more about it now but it would take several hours and I have just a few minutes. Check out the events happening all afternoon at Resurrection parish today if you wish, or just read about it yourself. There are picture cards with the Divine Mercy prayer on the back tables by the bulletins if you'd like one. I have one on my bathroom mirror. Check it out.

But the original "Divine Mercy" Sunday tradition comes from the time when the persecutions of the early Christians by the Roman emperors were coming to an end. During the persecutions, many people publicly recanted Christianity to save themselves and their families. Sometimes, they were forced to turn in the names of Christians or hiding places of vital church treasures like the early bibles or a consecrated chalice. But when the persecutions were over, they wanted to be accepted back in the Church. You can imagine how hard it was for the faithful remnant to allow those who had recanted to come back into community with them. There was a good deal of debate by the bishops back then, especially those in North Africa, who concluded, and rightly so, that the mercy of God knows no bounds.

Thus, the Sunday after Easter was the day set apart to allow those who had recanted entrance back into the Church. As difficult as it was, it ultimately brought healing and unity to the people of God.

How often in our lives do we see someone fighting hard for something we think is immoral or even abhorrent? Sometimes, people fight to defend such actions because admitting they are on the wrong side of the issue would be too much to bear. Think of how hard it was for the people in Germany after WWII or for slave owners in the United States 200 years ago to admit what they had done. Because of this sensitivity and difficulty to come to terms with the reality of a situation, it can be a more prudent choice to let them know that God can and will forgive virtually anything, that we are all repentant sinners in the Church, and we will always have room for more... no matter what their sin might be.

We are not saying what they have done is OK or that there aren't consequences. But as Pope Francis has suggested, it's often better to lead with mercy rather than condemnation. One of the best examples is the evolution of the prolife campaigns throughout the world. Rather than engage those at the abortion clinics with nasty signs or shouting slogans, the new campaigns offer prayer not only for an end to abortion but also for a change of heart for those working there. Now we expect that some will see this and change their minds about going through with an abortion.

But what's interesting is some of the abortion clinic workers come to see the immorality of what they are doing and walk out, visit with and, in some cases, even join with the protesters. Again, what is the result of Divine Mercy? It's healing and unity. Isn't that what Jesus did?

Think about the risen Jesus. How does he approach those who doubt Him, who choose to remain blind? Look at our friend doubting Thomas in today's gospel. Does Jesus rebuke him? No, I don't think so. He invites Thomas to embrace the wounds in His glorified body if that's what he needs to do. Jesus gives up His body, for what? Again, healing and unity. Just like He does for us at every Mass, at every Eucharist.

Christ died for us to set us free from our sins and then rose to give us hope for eternal life. Let us revel in the joy of his merciful love... and let it shine forth to those around us. *Alleluia!*