

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: Divine Mercy, the precious gift from God ...

In this month of April 2024, we are offering for your reflection Pope Francis' homily given on the Feast of Divine Mercy, 2nd Sunday of Easter, April 24th 2022, at St. Peter's Basilica, Rome
Good reflection and sharing.

Recall: Our monthly meeting should favour an encounter with Christ. A spirit of prayer will ensure a meeting that will promote a good experience for all the members.

APRIL 2024 MONTHLY MEETING

Opening of the meeting

The members can offer suggestions for a song, the prayer according to the Ritual or one chosen by the fraternity starts the meeting.

Introduction

Today the risen Lord appears to the disciples. To those who had abandoned him he offers his mercy and shows his wounds. The words he speaks to them are punctuated with a greeting that we hear three times in the Gospel: "Peace be with you!" (Jn 20:19.21.26). Peace be with you!

These are the words of the risen Jesus as he encounters every human weakness and error. Let us reflect on the three times Jesus says those words. In them, we will discover three aspects of God's mercy towards us. Those words first give joy, then grant forgiveness and finally offer comfort in every difficulty.

First, God's mercy gives joy,

First, God's mercy gives, a special joy, the joy of knowing that we have been freely forgiven. When, on the evening of Easter, the disciples see Jesus and hear him say for the first time, "Peace be with you", they rejoice (v. 20). They were locked behind closed doors out of fear; but they were also closed in on themselves, burdened by a sense of failure. They were disciples who had abandoned their Master; at the moment of his arrest, they had run away. Peter even denied him three times, and one of their number — one from among them! — had betrayed him.

They had good reason to feel not only afraid, but useless; they had failed. In the past, certainly, they had made courageous choices. They had followed the Master with enthusiasm, commitment and generosity. Yet in the end, everything had happened so fast. Fear prevailed and they committed the great sin: they left Jesus alone at his most tragic hour. Before Easter, they had thought that they were destined for greatness; they argued about who would be the greatest among them ... Now they have hit rock bottom.

Reflection and sharing

After the reading of the preceding paragraph, what do you think of the disciples reactions? Take the time necessary to share your thoughts.

In this climate, they hear for the first time, “Peace be with you!” The disciples ought to have felt shame, yet they rejoice. Why? Because seeing his face and hearing his greeting turned their attention away from themselves and towards Jesus. As the Gospel tells us, “ the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord” (v. 20). They were distracted from themselves and their failures and attracted by his gaze, that brimmed not with severity but with mercy. Christ did not reproach them for what they had done, but showed them his usual kindness. And this revives them, fills their hearts with the peace they had lost and makes them new persons, purified by a forgiveness that is utterly unmerited.

That is the joy Jesus brings. It is the joy that we too feel whenever we experience his forgiveness. We ourselves know what those disciples were feeling on Easter, because of our own lapses, sins and failures. At such times, we may think that nothing can be done. Yet that is precisely when the Lord does everything. He gives us his peace, through a good Confession, through the words of someone who draws near to us, through an interior consolation of the Spirit, or through some unexpected and surprising event...

In any number of ways, God shows that he wants to make us feel the embrace of his mercy, the joy born of receiving “pardon and peace”. The joy God gives is indeed born of forgiveness. It bestows peace. It is a joy that raises us up without humiliating us. It is as if the Lord does not understand what is happening. Brothers and sisters, let us think of all those times when we received the pardon and peace of Jesus.

Each one of us has received them; each one of us has had that experience. It is good for us to remember those moments. Let us put the memory of God’s warm embrace before the memory of our own mistakes and failings. In this way, we will grow in joy. For nothing will ever be the same for anyone who has experienced God’s joy! It is a joy that transforms us.

Reflection and sharing

In the reading of preceding paragraph, what did hear a phrase, a word or an expression that spoke to you in a particular way? Take the time necessary to share your thoughts.

Peace be with you!

Peace be with you! The Lord says these words a second time and adds, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (v. 22). He then gives the disciples the Holy Spirit to make them agents of reconciliation: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them” (v. 23). Not only do the disciples receive mercy; they become dispensers of the mercy that they themselves received. They receive this power not on account of their merits or studies, but as a pure gift of grace, based however on their experience of having been themselves forgiven.

I am now speaking to you, missionaries of mercy: if you do not feel forgiven, do not carry out your service as a missionary of mercy until you feel that forgiveness. The mercy that we have received enables us to dispense a great deal of mercy and forgiveness.

Today and every day, in the Church forgiveness must be received in this same way, through the humble goodness of a merciful confessor who sees himself not as the holder of some power but as a channel of mercy, who pours out upon others the forgiveness that he himself first received. From this arises the ability to forgive everything because God always forgives everything. We are the ones who tire of asking forgiveness but he always forgives.

You must be channels of that forgiveness through your own experience of being forgiven. There is no need to torment the faithful when they come to Confession. It is necessary to understand their situation, to listen, to forgive and to offer good counsel so that they can move forward. God forgives everything and we must not close that door to people.

Reflection and sharing

In the preceding paragraph, Pope Francis offers us many examples of mercy. Which messages does he bring us? Take the time to share your thoughts.

. “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them”. These words stand at the origin of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but not only. Jesus has made the entire Church a community that dispenses mercy, a sign and instrument of reconciliation for all humanity.

Brothers and sisters, each of us, in baptism, received the gift of the Holy Spirit to be a man or woman of reconciliation. Whenever we experience the joy of being set free from the burden of our sins and failings; whenever we know at firsthand what it means to be reborn after a situation that appeared hopeless, we feel the need to share with those around us the bread of mercy. Let us feel called to this.

And let us ask ourselves: at home, in my family, at work, in my community, do I foster fellowship, am I a weaver of reconciliation? Do I commit myself to defusing conflict, to bringing forgiveness in place of hatred, and peace in place of resentment? Do I avoid hurting others by not gossiping, which always kills? Jesus wants us to be his witnesses before the world with those words: Peace be with you! I have received peace. I give it to others.

Reflection and Sharing

In the preceding paragraph, choose to share your reactions to the questions presented. Take the time for a good sharing.

The Lord says these words a third time.

Peace be with you! The Lord says these words a third time when, eight days later, he appears to the disciples and strengthens the flagging faith of Thomas. Thomas wants to see and touch. The Lord is not offended by Thomas’s disbelief but comes to his aid: “Put your finger here and see my hands” (v. 27). These are not words of defiance but of mercy. Jesus understands Thomas’s difficulty. He does

not treat Thomas with harshness, and the apostle is deeply moved by this kindness. From a disbeliever, he becomes a believer, and makes the simplest and finest confession of faith: “My Lord and my God!” (v. 28). These are beautiful words. We can make them our own and repeat them throughout the day, especially when, like Thomas, we experience doubts and difficulties.

Reflection and Sharing

After the reading of the preceding paragraph, share your thoughts. Take the time necessary for a good sharing.

For the story of Thomas is in fact the story of every believer. There are times of difficulty when life seems to belie faith, moments of crisis when we need to touch and see. Like Thomas, it is precisely in those moments that we rediscover the heart of Christ, the Lord’s mercy. In those situations, Jesus does not approach us in triumph and with overwhelming proofs. He does not perform earth-shattering miracles, but instead offers us heartwarming signs of his mercy.

He comforts us in the same way he did in today’s Gospel: he offers us his wounds. We must not forget this fact. In response to our sin, — the ugliest of sins, whether ours or someone else’s — the Lord is always present offering us his wounds. Do not forget this. In our ministry as confessors, we must let the people see that in the midst of their sin, the Lord offers his wounds to them. The wounds of the Lord are stronger than sin.

Jesus makes us see the wounds of our brothers and sisters. In the midst of our own crises and our difficulties, divine mercy often makes us aware of the sufferings of our neighbour. We think that we are experiencing unbearable pain and situations of suffering, and we suddenly discover that others around us are silently enduring even worse things. If we care for the wounds of our neighbour and pour upon them the balm of mercy, we find being reborn within us a hope that comforts us in our weariness.

Let us ask ourselves whether of late we have helped someone suffering in mind or body; whether we have brought peace to someone suffering physically or spiritually; whether we have spent some time simply listening, being present, or bringing comfort to another person. For whenever we do these things, we encounter Jesus. From the eyes of all those who are weighed down by the trials of life, he looks out at us with mercy and says: Peace be with you!

In this regard, I think of Our Lady’s presence with the Apostles. I also recall that we commemorate her as Mother of the Church on the day following Pentecost and as Mother of Mercy on the Monday following Divine Mercy Sunday. May she help us move forward in our very beautiful ministry.

Reflection and Sharing

In the preceding paragraph, which part of the text brings you a new way of understanding our role as members of the Church? Take the time necessary to share your thoughts.

Biblical Reflection and Sharing:

Do the reading of this excerpt from the Gospel according to John 20, 20-29

Peace be with you. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again « Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you. » And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, « Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, there are retained. »

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So, the other disciples told him, « We have seen the Lord. » But he said to them, «Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe. »

Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, « Peace be with you, » Then he said to Thomas, « Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless but believing. » Thomas answered him, « My Lord and my God! » Jesus said to him, «You have believed because you have seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. »

Share your thoughts on this Gospel using the following questions:

- * Take a moment of reflection; underline the words or inspiring phrases ...
- *- Share your thoughts on the Gospel text chosen ...

Life-Objective

In this month of April, let us time to thank God for his divine mercy and know how to apply it in our relationships at all levels ...

End of the meeting (song or prayer chosen by the fraternity)

Suggestion: Pascal hymn

Gather the people! Enter the feast!

All are invited, the greatest and least.

The banquet is ready, now to be shared.

Join in the heavenly feast that God has prepared.

Around this table we dine as kin,

Beloved family of God.

We share the body of Christ, the Lord.

Here we become what we eat.

At home

Do a new reading of the text presented in this version of our tool – Living Fraternity – for this month.