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Annunciation Parish, Shumway, Illinois  
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The Second Sunday of Easter (C)  
Divine Mercy Sunday

What does it mean to have faith? What does it mean to say, "I believe"? The Letter to the Hebrews calls faith "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is "a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed."<sup>1</sup>

In what, then, in Whom, do we believe? "Only a God who loves us to the extent of taking upon himself our wounds and our pain, especially innocent suffering, is worthy of faith."<sup>2</sup>

What is it then that has been revealed? What we have heard? It is the same message the disciples announced to Thomas: "We have seen the Lord" (John 20:25). It is the same message John received in his vision of the heavenly throne room:

When I caught sight of [Jesus], I fell down at his feet as though dead. He touched me with his right hand and said, "Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, the one who lives. Once I was dead, but now I live forever and ever. I hold the keys to death and the netherworld (Revelation 1:17-18).

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<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 150.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Benedict, XVI, Easter Message *Urbi et Orbi* 2007.

We, together with the Apostles and the disciples, believe firmly that Christ Jesus was crucified, died and has risen from the dead. This is the message of faith handed on by the Church; it is this message in which we believe. We believe "because of the authority of God himself who reveals [this], who can neither deceive nor be deceived."<sup>3</sup>

But it happens that sometimes our faith is shaken. It is not always easy to believe this message when confronted with what appears to be evidence to the contrary. From time to time we think of the early Christians and we say that it would have been very easy to believe then because they saw and heard Jesus both before and after his death. The Gospel reading today, however, shows that this is a false assumption. Believing was not easy even for the Apostles.

Thomas was not alone in his doubt. Think of the many disciples who abandoned Jesus when he told them, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). Matthew tells us that when the Apostles saw Jesus on the mountain in Galilee after the Resurrection, "they worshipped him; but they doubted" (Matthew 28:17).

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<sup>3</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 156.

Indeed, "we may all be tempted by the disbelief of Thomas," the Holy Father said last Sunday as he addressed the city of Rome and the world. He went on to say:

Suffering, evil, injustice, death, especially when it strikes the innocent such as children who are victims of war and terrorism, of sickness and hunger, does not all of this put our faith to the test? Paradoxically the disbelief of Thomas is most valuable to us in these cases because it helps to purify all false concepts of God and leads us to discover his true face: the face of a God who, in Christ, has taken upon himself the wounds of injured humanity. Thomas has received from the Lord, and he has in turn transmitted to the Church, the gift of a faith put to the test by the passion and death of Jesus and confirmed by meeting him risen. His faith was almost dead but was born again thanks to his touching the wounds of Christ, those wounds that the Risen One did not hide but showed, and continues to point out to us in the trials and sufferings of every human being.<sup>4</sup>

The doubt of Thomas shows us that Jesus continually calls us to faith, showing us his hands and his side, showing us the marks of his love that knows no bounds. "Jesus bears the stigmata,

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Easter Message *Urbi et Orbi* 2007.

the signs of his passion: his wounds, his suffering, have become power: the love that conquers death."<sup>5</sup>

Even as he extends his hands to us and invites us to examine the marks of his cross, to delve deep into the mystery of his love, he says to us:

I arose and now I am still with you... My hand upholds you. Wherever you may fall, you will always fall into my hands. I am present even at the door of death. Where no one can accompany you further, and where you can bring nothing, even there I am waiting for you, and for you I will change darkness into light.<sup>6</sup>

Here we see His Divine Mercy, which we celebrate in a special way today. His hand is ever stretched out toward us in love, ready to grasp our hand and lift us up. His mercy is always available to us, if only we seek Him.

"By his wounds you have been healed," says Saint Peter (I Peter 2:24). "Only a God who loves us to the extent of taking upon himself our wounds and our pain, especially innocent suffering, is worthy of faith."<sup>7</sup>

Having seen the marks of the crucifixion, Thomas recognizes not only the humanity of Christ Jesus but his divinity as well. Seeing both God and man, his doubt changes to belief and he

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<sup>5</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 7 April 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 7 April 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Benedict, XVI, Easter Message *Urbi et Orbi* 2007.

cries out: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). Can there be a greater statement of faith than this? Seeing with his eyes the wounds of Crucified Love, the very marks of Divine Mercy, Thomas comes to faith in "him whom they have pierced" (John 19:37).

With Thomas and the Eleven, the Lord has given us the gift of faith, but it is possible to lose this gift if we lose sight of the glorious wounds of the Crucified One who is risen. We must guard this precious treasure, this "pearl of great price" that it might grow and deepen each day (Matthew 13:46).

"To live, grow, and persevere in faith until the end we must nourish it with the word of God; we must beg the Lord to increase our faith."<sup>8</sup> We must daily cry out, "Lord, 'I believe; help my unbelief!'" (Mark 9:24). When he comes to us and shows us the marks of his love we, with Thomas, must cry out: "My Lord and my God!"

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<sup>8</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 162.