

Fr. John's Homily for Divine Mercy Sunday, April 24, 2022

JMJ CHS

Love, love, love, love, love. Kind of an unusual way to start a homily, right? Well I can't take credit for those first few words as I've plagiarized them from another priest. As a matter of fact, some of you might have actually heard them before. They are from Fr. David Hudgens, the priest who died in a car accident last January. The Diocese of Lansing wanted you all to get to know him, even in death, by way of his words. It was his homily for Divine Mercy Sunday last year, preached at the Cathedral, and it was about a famous apostle. And if you did in fact look that homily up, (and you still can -- go to YouTube and type in his name) you could easily see how brilliant a man he was ... knowledgeable, funny and very insightful. I won't be able to match his skill.

But, to complete the thought, love love love love love, you, St. Thomas. Because, as Father Dave implied, you Thomas, gave us a perfect witness of what it means to be a person of little faith, a doubter. And this makes you, Thomas, our patron saint. Because who among us has not doubted?

The setting is one week after that first Easter. The apostles are getting used to their new situation. They have been vindicated; all their work, all their hope, all their blood, sweat, and tears have not been in vain. Jesus has, indeed, risen from the dead as He said He would. And they have now shared this story with their friend, Thomas, who was absent the week before. But he doesn't believe them. The crucifixion is such a brutal form of capital punishment that Thomas, despite all he had ever seen and heard, just can't believe because nobody returns from a crucifixion. He is incredulous and refuses to accept the fact that Jesus could have survived all that torture.

But one week later, the scene is repeated for Thomas's benefit. Jesus again appears in their midst. "Peace be with you." And He calls him forward and, well, you know how it goes. Thomas is gently invited to put his hands into the wounds. And what does he say? "My Lord and my God."

And so we love, love, love, love you again Thomas, because you, too, have been vindicated. The Holy Spirit inspired you, in an act of mercy, to make this bold proclamation about Jesus. He is no longer just Jesus, Son of God, Son of David, Son of man, Son of Mary and Joseph. No longer just Messiah, Savior, the One Who is Coming Into the World. Yes Jesus, is all of those things, but now, as spoken by the humbled lips of your doubting apostle, You are also ... My Lord and my God.

Jesus could have been quite ticked off at Thomas, but in His graciousness and in His Mercy, He gives Thomas a way out; and now he can be known not only for being the most famous doubter of all times, but also the first official proclaimer of

the Divinity of Jesus. In other words, for the first time anywhere, it is proclaimed that Jesus is God.

I would like to now say something about the special feast day that we celebrate today on this first Sunday after Easter. It is relatively new in the Church, coming out of Poland in the years leading up to World War II. Jesus appeared to a young girl, Helena Kowalska, while she was dancing the polka. And He asked her a pointed question, “How long will I have to put up with you?” Apparently she had sensed a vocational call, but she wasn’t responding and Jesus expressed impatience with her. I can certainly relate to this story as I, too, was reluctant to answer my call. Jesus was very patient with me as well.

In any case, Helena did find her way into a religious order and took the religious name Sister Maria Faustina. At some point Jesus appeared to her and gave her messages which would eventually be put into the book *Divine Mercy in My Soul*. And then there were instructions for a special prayer called the *Chaplet of Mercy*, and the *Novena to Divine Mercy*, which we just completed yesterday, the *Image of Divine Mercy* and lastly, the feast day of Divine Mercy that we celebrate today all around the world. And so we faithful, here today, celebrate what has been called *God’s Greatest Attribute*. Namely, His Mercy.

OK, maybe a little definition of mercy would be in order here. We can’t talk about mercy without first mentioning justice. Justice is when God gives us what we deserve. It may be good or bad. But mercy is when God doesn’t give us what we deserve, presuming that we deserve punishment for our sinfulness. I would like to quote a passage from the Bible that kind of describes what I’m talking about. “Merciless will be the judgment of God on those who have not shown mercy in this world. But, in the end, mercy triumphs over judgment.” I like that. Mercy triumphs over judgment because that’s the nature of mercy. It’s part of the definition of mercy.

We always like to see concrete examples of mercy to help us understand this greatest of attributes. The biggest and most sufficient one is that one right up there. But how about things in our own time and place? Well, the current phenomena out there is the story of *Father Stu*, a movie that’s out in theaters right now. It’s the story of a bad boy who God had His eye on, who eventually became a priest. This is a movie about the vocation, and despite all of its R-rated language, I have only heard compliments from those who have seen the movie. Most of us shed some tears as we watched the incredible transformation of this heathen into a man of God. I could speak a lot about him but it would be a spoiler for those of you who have not seen the movie yet.

But, how about if I were to tell you the story of the man who played the part of Fr. Stu? I was not very familiar at all with Mark Wahlberg. But after watching this movie I was a bit curious and so I went to the Internet to find out more about him. And to be perfectly honest with you, he was much worse than the man he

portrayed in the movie. And while I would like to tell you all about him, well, that would make my homily R-rated and I don't want anybody writing the Bishop.

But as recently as 2017, Mark Wahlberg was the highest paid actor in Hollywood. He is now a devout Catholic, married only once, but in his earlier days he was among other things, a rapper, and was called out for being a racist on more than one occasion. He said and did some very public things that could have damaged his reputation beyond repair except for the fact of one thing, and that is God's Mercy. God took this broken man and with great patience rebuilt him into a new person; a person that would make a movie about a priest, and he would be in the starring role. That movie, despite its rawness, has become an accepted portrayal of a priest who in many ways, represents all of us. Here, Mark and Stu, are like Thomas and Peter and Matthew, and Simon the Zealot, and all the rest who are great examples to us of God's greatest attribute, His Mercy.

As mentioned earlier, the *Divine Mercy Devotion* came out at a time in history that was heart wrenching. World War II was devastating. But their devotion gave hope to those who were living out those times. For this younger generation, it may have seemed a little hard to relate to. That was, in a sense, ancient history, at least for us baby boomers. But within these past two years I think our perspectives have changed. With pandemics, internal strife in our country and in our very homes, terrorism, gender identity issue, political divisions, a war in Eastern Europe and fears for the future of our country and our world, our freedoms, our way of life, yes, I believe that people can once again recognize the need for God's Mercy in our lives and in our times.

Only a small percentage of people in our church, that is, our local church, and the universal church, pay much attention to the Chaplet of Mercy. We have tried to provide the opportunity here at the end of Mass to say the Chaplet but only a few have responded. Same goes for a Rosary before Mass as we pray for the crisis in Ukraine. But Jesus said to the Disciples in the garden, "Could you not watch one hour with me? Watch and pray, that you might not enter into temptation."

Twelve extra minutes, after Mass, and then we can go off to do whatever we typically do after Mass...coffee and donuts or a spot at the head of the line at your favorite restaurant.

During this time of great need for God's Mercy, Sunday afternoon at 3 o'clock, which we call *The Hour of Mercy*, we will again gather here to celebrate the greatest attribute and for God's Mercy on our souls, to plead with Him for the restoration of our broken families, our parish Community, our country and our world. Please join us this afternoon at the Hour of Mercy.

+Fr. John