

Second Sunday of Easter

April 27, 2025

With great sadness the Church mourns the death of Pope Francis. From the very beginning of his pontificate, our Holy Father joyfully proclaimed the Gospel of God's merciful love, inviting the Church, that's you and me, and the world to receive that mercy and to become its witnesses through personal accompaniment.

Pope Francis reminded the Church that she lives and works by listening and dialogue, and for three years led her through a global process of synodality. In his personal care for the poor, the vulnerable, and those on the margins and peripheries of society, Francis embodied the Gospel's command to identify with and to serve the least of Christ's brothers and sisters (Mt 25:40), and through his teaching and action on integral ecology, he testified to the ways that all are called to care for humanity's common home.

It's my hope and prayer that in the years to come, his service in the Chair of Peter will continue to nourish the unity of believers in faith and communion and to awaken the hearing of faith in all people of good will.

May God grant eternal rest to our late Supreme Pontiff, Francis, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

My dear friends, one of the challenges in reading or hearing or studying in faith passages from Scripture is trying to figure out where we fit in all of it. Sometimes the stories of our faith are difficult to connect to our lives today, two thousand years later. "What does the story of Noah's ark have to do with you or me?" we might ask. Or our father in faith, Abraham, and the near-sacrifice of Isaac? Or Joseph and his brothers? Or countless stories from the mouth of Jesus, stories in which he's talking about a world far removed from our own, a world with many different customs and traditions and religious practices?

At times, Sacred Scripture can seem like words meant only for people who lived long ago. Our task two thousand years later, is to try to connect the dots between these sacred words written long ago and our day-to-day realities. And it's not always easy. But today it is.

That's why the story we just heard and hear every single year on the Sunday after Easter is so powerful and memorable. In fact, it is one of the few times when Jesus seems to be talking directly to us plainly and without ambiguity. No enigmatic words. No parable turning our expectations upside-down. No otherworldly discourses which strain our ability to understand or comprehend. No, today our Lord refers to us in his conversation with his small group of disciples long ago:

“Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”

There is no doubt who he is talking about. He's talking about you and me and countless others through the centuries, every single person who didn't have the profound privilege of encountering the risen Jesus. Except for that ridiculously small number, all the rest had to take the word of someone else, had to believe in a story told by another, that is, had to believe even though they hadn't seen. Again that's you and me. And for this, Jesus calls us “blessed”.

The claims of Christianity are pretty outrageous. And by “outrageous” I don't mean “untrue”. I simply mean that they are (on the surface) almost unbelievable by their very nature. And not just a few but a lot of them. And none stretches our minds and our reason more than the resurrection of Jesus. The fact that any of us believe it at all is itself a kind of miracle.

And that means there almost always will be doubts. There always will be a certain amount of not-knowing. There certainly will always be a shortage of “empirical” evidence. There will often be a good deal of confusion, and puzzlement, a kind of “throwing up of our hands” wondering what it all

means and wondering whether or not we are even close to understanding what God wants us to understand about these great mysteries of life.

And that's where faith comes in. And make no mistake about it, faith comes from God. The fact that we can believe at all is itself a gift, a gift from our loving God who wants nothing more than for us to draw closer to him, commune with him, dwell in him and he in us. But faith requires embracing things that can't be proved, accepting things we can't fully understand, believing things we cannot see.

So in a certain sense, faith is about somehow being okay with the doubts, with not-knowing, okay with not seeing or understanding clearly and yet living as if we do, living as if we are confident of what has been handed down to us from those first believers. In other words, faith is about being honest and accepting that we really "don't know" while at the same time choosing to live as if we do, choosing to live life with a certain kind of confidence and trust that we are on the right path, the path back to the God who made us and who died for us.

The difference-maker in all of this is the way we look at the world, the lens of faith by which we experience all of creation, particularly one another. We don't believe in a God who is absent from the world, but rather one who is immersed in it. And that means that there is evidence of God and glimpses of his presence everywhere in every creature and every rock, in every situation and circumstance, and, most importantly, in every single person, even our enemies. And our journey of faith becomes a little easier each time we can discover and encounter our God as we go about our day-to-day lives. He's even behind the locked doors of our own hearts, waiting for us to recognize him.

"Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

My dear friends, we will probably never see the risen Jesus in the tangible and intimate way his disciples did short of our life with God in heaven. But that doesn't mean we have to go through life blind, doesn't mean we have to stumble through life without any evidence of his existence or presence. God is still in our midst.

We just have to know where to look.

Today is Divine Mercy Sunday. A *TIME* magazine issue in 1984 presented a startling cover. It pictured a prison cell where two men sat on metal folding chairs. The young man wore a blue turtleneck sweater, blue jeans and white running shoes. The older man was dressed in a white robe and had a white skullcap on his head. They sat facing one another, up-close and personal. They spoke quietly so as to keep others from hearing their conversation.

The young man was Mehmet Ali Agca, the pope's would-be assassin (who shot and wounded the Pope on May 13, 1981); the other man was Pope St. John Paul II, the intended victim. The Pope held the hand that had held the gun whose bullet had torn into the Pope's body.

This was a living icon of mercy. John Paul's forgiveness was deeply Christian. His deed with Ali Agca spoke a thousand words. He embraced his enemy and pardoned him. At the end of their 20-minute meeting, Ali Agca raised the Pope's hand to his forehead as a sign of respect. John Paul shook Ali Agca's hand tenderly. When the Pope left the cell he said, *"What we talked about must remain a secret between us. I spoke to him as a brother whom I have pardoned and who has my complete trust."* — This is an example of God's Divine Mercy, the same Divine Mercy we celebrate today and whose message St. Faustina witnessed.