

## Second Sunday of Easter

Year C, 2025

Acts 5:12-16  
Ps 118

Rev 1:9-13, 17-19  
Jn 20:19-31

*As the Father has sent me*

Happy Easter!

The death of Pope Francis on Easter Monday has captured the attention of the whole world. The eighty-eight-year-old pontiff had been in poor health for some time, and his death, while not unexpected, came more quickly than most of us could have imagined. In 2005, Pope John Paul II died on the Saturday of Easter week, the night before Divine Mercy Sunday. Now in 2025, Pope Francis dies on the Monday of Easter week. Francis was Pope, *papa*, father of the universal Church for twelve years and forty-five days.

Francis's papacy, from the beginning, was marked by one word: mercy. The motto he chose for himself upon assuming the office of Peter begins with the Latin word meaning, "by having mercy." *Miserando atque eligendo*, an expression taken from a homily by St Bede, an eighth-century English monk and doctor of the Church, on Jesus's call of Matthew. In that homily, St Bede observed that "Jesus saw the tax collector, and since he sees *by having mercy and by choosing*, he said to him, 'Follow me.'" Matthew was a tax collector, a public sinner, ranked with prostitutes. And Jesus saw him, a public sinner, and called him. Why? Because Jesus sees *by having mercy and by choosing*. It is the divine choice to have mercy. The divine will is

mercy, forgiveness. This is how God sees: he sees those in need of mercy, and these he calls to follow him, so that his mercy can find a home. In this, God's will is done.

This motto, which Jorge Bergoglio first chose when he was named a bishop in 1992, reveals much about how saw himself: as one in need of mercy and therefore chosen by God. But it also reveals much about how the man who would become Pope Francis desired to look at others and at the world. He wanted to imitate Jesus, who sees by having mercy and by choosing those upon whom he will work his mercy.

If Jesus sees by having mercy, then we might conclude that if anyone or anything does not stand in need of mercy, then that person or that thing is not seen by God and therefore remains unchosen. To remain unseen by God is to be unknown to God. And what is unknown cannot be chosen. There is no greater darkness, no greater loneliness, no greater isolation than to be so unseen, unknown, unchosen. This is oblivion. To be, to exist, and yet never to be seen, known, and chosen, loved... this seems to me a hellish kind of existence, a suffering we can hardly imagine.

And rightly so, that is, unimaginable, because God does in fact see all things, know all things, choose all things, in all of what he created, every atom in the immeasurable and unfathomable vastness of the cosmos, of which we here on earth, by comparison, are of infinitesimal insignificance. But since God sees, knows, and chooses

all things, then it stands to reason that God also has mercy on all things, that all that is stands in need of mercy, grace, loving-kindness, steadfast love, compassion, all of which are English words used to approximate the Hebrew word, *chesed*, which expresses the covenantal mercy-love between God and his people.

God sees by having mercy and by choosing. This is what is revealed in Jesus. But we do not see in this way, for, through sin, we have lost this vision of the world and of others. We see, but only partially. We see, but our sight is imperfect, marred. We see, but we have blind spots precisely where we have sin. And who would be so brazen and foolish to say that he has perfect vision, that he has no sin, and so no need of repentance, no cause to ask forgiveness?

In today's Gospel, the risen Jesus appears to the disciples, huddled together in fear behind locked doors, and offers them his peace. Then he explains, "*As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*" No longer will they cower in fear, hidden behind closed doors. They will now go out into the world to accomplish the same purpose as Jesus. "*As the Father has sent me.*" And for what purpose did the Father send Jesus? To have mercy on the world. For Jesus sees by having mercy and by choosing. Now the disciples of Jesus – those of twenty centuries ago and those of today – are charged to do the same: to see, as Jesus saw, through mercy. And mercy will reveal to our sight what sin has blinded us to seeing. And upon what we see, we must act with mercy and choose it.

Jesus's whole life and mission was one of merciful seeing. Through mercy, he saw what others could not or would not see. He looked upon the poor and the lowly, the forgotten and the neglected, the despised and the outcast, the suffering and the sinner. What the sin of the world was blind to, Jesus saw, by having mercy and by choosing. Whatever and whoever needed mercy, lovingkindness, compassion, grace, these Jesus saw. These Jesus spoke to, taught, touched, healed. For this he was sent. And now he sends his disciples to go and do the same.

Perhaps it was for this reason that Pope Francis called the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy in 2015-2016. More than perhaps. Pope Francis himself, in a brief homily given on the eve of Divine Mercy Sunday in 2015, explained why he had called the Jubilee of Mercy: "we need to be *vigilant* and to reawaken in ourselves the capacity *to see* what is essential" and as a Church "to offer more evident signs of God's presence and closeness." He concluded by asking for Mary's intercession: "May the Mother of God *open our eyes*, so that we may understand the task to which we have been called." That task: mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation. Vigilant, to see, open our eyes: the Pope's words have a common theme. It is an invitation to imitate Jesus, who sees by having mercy and then by choosing those in need of mercy to belong to him.

The document by which Pope Francis opened the Jubilee of Mercy, called *Misericordiae vultus*, begins with these words: "Jesus is the face of the Father's mercy." In that document, Papa Francesco makes this

plea: “Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help! May we reach out to them and support them so they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity! May their cry become our own, and together may we break down the barriers of indifference that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism!” (MV, 15).

But in order to see others through mercy, we ourselves first have to be healed by mercy. Which is why Jesus’s mission of mercy is also “to restore sight to those who can no longer see because they are caught up in themselves” (MV, 16). Sin, you see, is, at its root, selfishness, self-centeredness, ego, pride. And these are what blind us to others’ need for mercy.

On this Divine Mercy Sunday, it would be pointless at best, sacrilegious at worst, to ask for mercy for ourselves, while remaining willfully blind to others’ need for mercy. If our receiving mercy leaves us indifferent to others’ need to receive mercy, and to receive it directly from us, then we should seriously question whether we have really received mercy at all or whether we’re not just going through the motions of mercy, indulging in a counterfeit mockery of divine grace, of God’s lovingkindness, of the biblical *chesed*.

So today, no cheap grace. No peaceful, easy feeling. Today, in honor of this legacy of Pope Francis, who sometimes had hard and direct

words for those who failed in their duty to mercy, let us be courageous enough, honest enough, to call ourselves to account on what we fail to see, through our sinful, that is, willful, blindness. Let us admit where we, individually and as a society, fail to be merciful, fail to see, fail to choose. To do this, we have only to read the Gospel. Or for further reflection, we could read some of Pope Francis's most important writings, in particular *Laudato si'* and *Fratelli tutti*, where he addressed at length the Christian obligation to mercy.

Our blind spots, here and now, for us Americans here in America are principally these, in my estimation, based on my reflection of the Gospel and of the teachings of Pope Francis. For these, we need the Divine Mercy:

Mercy toward the poor, who are preyed upon by the rich in an economic and political system geared to the advantage of those who have, so that they can have more, while actively ignoring those who have so much less. Our poor we socially marginalize and stigmatize, we politically disenfranchise, we economically outprice and impoverish. We want them out of sight, out of mind, segregated and apart. We build whole luxury communities and gate them to keep ourselves away from the "contamination" of the poor. Have mercy on us, Lord Jesus, so that through the eyes of mercy, we can see the barbaric cruelty of the social inequalities that we perpetuate.

Mercy toward strangers, today called immigrants, who are demonized, scapegoated, deprived of civil and physical liberties,

wronged and oppressed, treated with contempt and rejected. Where do we find the nerve to boast of our supposed hospitality and friendliness, when we treat with disdain and suspicion the foreign-born who live among us, work alongside us, support our economy and way of life? To our shame we have found clever ways to not see them, and having made ourselves purposefully blind to them, to be unmerciful toward them. Have mercy on us, Lord Jesus, so that we can learn to welcome the stranger as you yourself have commanded us to do.

Mercy toward the imprisoned, since America has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, and Louisiana the highest rate of incarceration in America. This is shameful. How is it that the richest country in the world, in the history of the world, thinks it good policy to spend the wealth and treasure of its people incarcerating others, mostly poor people, criminalizing their sins and wrongdoing while excusing or ignoring the sins of the upper classes? The carceral state, the prison state, which the US and Louisiana in particular are, is a failure of mercy and justice. And the for-profit prison system, run by private enterprises, is an affront to righteousness. No Christian society would tolerate such an indecency, and no society that does has the right to call itself Christian. Have mercy on us, Lord Jesus, so that we can repent of the selfish impulse to punish and seek vengeance, that we may learn that mercy means not imprisonment, but setting others free, from poverty, from ignorance, from violence, and from vice.

Finally, mercy toward the earth, our common home, whose beauty and resources we have abused through unsustainable practices that serve the economic interests of the few over the right of all to live in a safe and clean environment. Our lifestyle – our materialistic and consumeristic consumption of food, entertainment, travel, comforts and luxuries – is doing violence and damage to the created world of which we are meant to be stewards, not despoilers. Have mercy on us, Lord Jesus, that we might come to see obscenity of our rapacious treatment of the natural environment and in repentance, treat creation with mercy, with lovingkindness, as we atone for the wrong we have done to the planet, the only place in the entire cosmos given to us by God to be our earthly home, a paradise that we have befouled and polluted.

I'm guessing that this wasn't the take on Divine Mercy Sunday that most of you would have expected. As a society, we have our favorite sins, the ones we want most to be eradicated and forgiven. But that doesn't mean that those are the sins for which we bear the most guilt. No one here, I venture to guess, would have objected if I had given a homily bearing down on the sins of lust or abortion or petty criminality. But the fact that many, if not most of you are uncomfortable with what I've called you to task on today is likely a sign that it is in these places where you most need mercy, conversion, and repentance. I know to be true, first of all, for myself.

But I've said nothing new. This has been the basis of Catholic social teaching for a couple of hundred years now. This was an important



part of Papa Francesco's legacy. This is the heart of the Gospel, taken from the very words and actions of Jesus.

So if on this Divine Mercy Sunday, we have learned about mercy in a new way, even in a way that challenges us, then, good, and God be praised. But now go, and "be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36), for, in the words of Jesus, "as the Father has sent me, so I send you." Have mercy, Lord. Have mercy. Amen.