Homily - Divine Mercy Sunday 2015

By the Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
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Readings: Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 117; 1 John 5:1-6; John 20:19-31

As we gather here in the Cathedral this afternoon to celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday, the Gospel presents us with three words which can guide us in our reflections. The first is "peace".

Three times in today's Gospel story, Jesus says to His disciples, "peace be with you". It is the greeting which most characterises the meetings of the risen Lord with His disciples. After the horror of the terrible suffering and brutal execution of Jesus, and the despair of His disciples as they saw all their hopes die with Jesus, the resurrection, perhaps surprisingly, brings peace.

No doubt it also brought great exhilaration, excitement, energy and wonder to the disciples but it is peace which the risen Lord intends to bring into people's lives. It is, of course, a peace that only Jesus can give. In St John's Gospel, in the account of the Last Supper, Jesus promises His disciples the gift of peace but reminds them that it is a peace not as the world understands it but as God understands it. And, as the disciples will discover as they begin after the resurrection to go out and spread the story of the resurrection, it is not a peace that guarantees the absence of challenge, of struggle, of opposition, and of difficulty. It is a peace which comes not from without but from within. It is a peace that is born in the heart and carried in the heart, no matter what else might be happening in a person's life.

We can understand the nature of this peace when we reflect on the second word which stands out in today's Gospel reading. The word is "forgive". On the first Holy Thursday night, as Jesus took bread and wine and gave them to His disciples, He told them that the bread and wine were in truth His body and blood broken and poured out on the cross. And this, He said, would take place so that sins might be forgiven.

Now, as the risen Lord, He comes to them not only to tell them that their sins are indeed forgiven but to entrust them with the mission of bringing this gift of forgiveness to all who are ready to receive it. *"Those whose sins you forgive will be forgiven,"* He tells them, *"and those whose sins you hold back will be held back."* Of course, we know that this wonderful gift of forgiveness is offered freely to all. It is only the refusal to accept it which can prevent us from receiving it.

Today's Gospel, and today's Feast, invite us to reflect on the profound truth that the peace the Lord offers us is the fruit of the forgiveness we receive. Our own experience will tell us, I am

sure, that what most destroys our inner peace and serenity is our realisation of how far we are from being the people we most deeply desire to be and the people God has created us to be.

As St Augustine would remind us, we are made for God and will always be restless until we find our rest in God. It is sin which cuts us off from God. It is sin which cuts us off from the source of our peace. It is sin which leaves us uneasy, dissatisfied with our lives and with ourselves. And it is sin which the Risen Lord comes to forgive and heal in our lives.

The words of Jesus - ask and you will receive - are nowhere more true than in relation to our sinfulness and our need for forgiveness. We have only to ask, with sincerity and sorrow, and we will be forgiven. And with that forgiveness will come the gift of a peace that the world cannot give.

The third word which rings out from today's Gospel is "believe". It comes from the lips of Jesus in response to the failure of Thomas to believe that the Lord has truly risen. Thomas demands a sign - that he be able to touch the wounded hands and side of Jesus - and he is given that chance.

We might be envious of Thomas had not Jesus then said to him, *"How much more blessed and happy are those who have not seen but yet believe"*. We are not wrong to see in these words of Jesus a reference to ourselves. We do not see Jesus as Thomas and the other apostles did. We do not see Him as Mary and Joseph did. We do not see Him as the people in the villages Jesus visited during his lifetime did. But we do see Him through the gift of faith. It is our faith that enables us to recognise him in the Eucharist. It is our faith that helps us to see Him in the pages of the Gospel. It is our faith that allows us to see Him in our Church. It is our faith that prompts us to identify Him in the poor, the lonely, the broken, the forgotten.

The themes of peace, of forgiveness and of belief or faith come together in this Feast of Divine Mercy. What links them are the words we find on the bottom of the image of the Lord as divine mercy, the image given to us by the Lord through the faith of St Faustina. We know the words so well: Jesus, I trust in you.

In so many ways, the words "trust" and "faith" are interchangeable. Our faith in Jesus, our belief in Him, is not something that happens only in our heads. It is not simply an intellectual thing. Our faith is really our ongoing entrustment of ourselves to His love, His compassion, His mercy and His unfailing presence in our lives. And it is this faith, this trust, which is the source of our peace. It is this trust which allows us to believe the word of the Lord when He says to us in the midst of our personal storms, *"Do not be afraid. I am with you"*. It is this trust which enables us to respond to Him when He says to us, *"Come to me if you labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest"*. It is this trust which sustains us as we keep trying to commit ourselves to Him as the Way we should follow, the Truth we should believe in and the Life we should embrace.

"Jesus, I trust in you." This prayer is an expression of our hope, a statement of our desire, a proclamation of our faith and a deep manifestation of our conviction that it is only in Him that we can find our rest. May it become, day by day, a prayer that sinks more and more deeply into our hearts and minds, shaping all that we are and all that we will become.