

*Miserando atque eligendo.* “Having mercy; chosen.” This is the motto and approximate English translation of our Holy Father, Pope Francis. Upon his episcopal ordination, every new bishop chooses for himself a motto that appears on his coat of arms. This Latin phrase was chosen by Jorge Bergoglio, which he maintained upon becoming pope. It struck him upon reading it in a sermon by St. Bede who was commenting upon the call of St. Matthew. In that sermon, written originally in Latin, St. Bede observes that, despite being a tax collector, *having had mercy on Matthew, Christ still chose him for an Apostle.*

Pope Francis has commented that this phrase always moved him because Matthew, having done nothing as far as we can tell to merit being called by Christ to such an important and lofty position- in fact, rather the opposite- Jesus looked upon him with mercy and saw instead what he could become. For our Holy Father, this very much spoke to his own experience, first in being called to religious life, eventually to priesthood, later to becoming a bishop and ultimately, the Vicar of Christ on earth. Having looked upon Jorge Bergoglio through the eyes of mercy, Jesus chose him; called him; ordained him.

When we consider the origins of the word which we translate as ‘mercy’- *miser cordia*- we discover that it has to do with two themes: first, a movement of the heart; and second, someone’s misery. With this understanding, we can make sense of the definition of mercy from St. Thomas Aquinas which is to be moved to the heart at the sight of someone else’s misery in order to lift them up.

Realizing that someone is in such a state that he or she will not get up without another's hand.

Today, thanks to the generous revelations of our Lord, the carefully kept diary and perseverance of St. Faustina Kowalska and the determination of Pope St. John Paul II, forevermore, this second Sunday of Easter and close of the Easter Octave is known as Divine Mercy Sunday. This is a day dedicated for remembering with thanksgiving and confidence the merciful ways in which our Lord has been at work in our lives and the life of the Church. We tend to generally reduce mercy to the notion of the forgiveness of our sins. However, forgiveness is but one small part of mercy- an important part, to be sure- but only a part. In the fullest sense of the term, the entirety of salvation history is God showing mercy to us; it is the very heart of God being moved, as it were, by the sight of human misery in order that we may be raised up, lifted to a state otherwise impossible.

It is very fitting, therefore, that we hear the Gospel passage which we do every year on Divine Mercy Sunday. This morning, we witnessed our Lord perform a tremendous act of mercy. By this, I do not mean the forgiveness of the Apostles's sins; nor the forgiveness of Thomas' doubting; neither the authority He bestows upon them to forgive and retain sins. What I am referring to is the very fact that, despite the Apostles' behaviour following Jesus' passion, *looking upon them through the eyes of mercy*, He chooses them again.

What has been clear since the events of last week Thursday are that, upon Jesus' arrest- initiated by an Apostle- all but one of them scattered; their leader denied ever knowing Jesus; they failed to believe the account of Mary Magdalene that He had risen from the dead- Peter himself even seeing the empty tomb- and so they locked themselves back in the upper room, terrified of being arrested. These men who at various points in their lives had given up everything to follow Jesus, who had professed His divinity, who had promised to remain by His side always, were now cowering in fear at the possibility of facing the same fate as He. How far they had fallen. In other words, how *miserable* they had become. And looking upon their misery, Jesus lifted them up.

When appearing in their midst, He does not rebuke them, He does not instruct them, He does not correct them. Instead, He says "Peace be with you." This is followed up by a very powerful gesture: breathing upon them He says, receive the Holy Spirit. And it is here that He bestows upon them that priestly power to forgive and retain sins. Despite their misery, despite their betrayals, despite their doubts, He allows them to look upon His glorified wounds and then raises them up- as if having already been raised up to the level of Apostles among the disciples wasn't enough- He raises them up to the priesthood.

Although it is important that we regard this feast, on this day, paired with these readings as a clear indication that God's mercy is intimately bound up with the forgiveness of our sins in the sacrament of reconciliation, let us never forget

that first, He has made that sacrament possible by a prior act of mercy: the institution of the Holy Priesthood.

In leaving Himself to us in not only the Eucharist, but also in the priesthood, Jesus has looked into our misery through the eyes of mercy and given Himself to us in yet another tangible way. And for we who are so humbled to be called to this vocation, be assured that we regard it first as a tremendous act of mercy in our lives. I, for one, marvel at the fact that despite my sinfulness and weaknesses, our Lord has looked upon me not for what I have done and failed to do but for who He knows I could become. In calling men to the priesthood- even men sitting in these pews at this moment- He renews this great gesture of mercy. Pray for your priests! We are weak, but in Him and with your prayers, we can be strong. Pray for vocations to the priesthood, especially from among your parishioners. God has ordained that through the gift of the priesthood which He has bestowed on His Church, we all might one day fall to our knees before the glory of His risen son, and like the priest, St. Thomas, exclaim, *My Lord and my God.*