



*May 5, 2019*  
- Fr. Tom Wilson, Pastor

## THE FIRST STEP TO NEW LIFE

Easter, our “week of Easter Days.” The celebration of mercy coincides with the request in a private revelation to St. Faustina by Jesus Himself to institute a feast that celebrates His great mercy to a sinful generation. It took nearly 70 years for the feast to be placed on the permanent and universal liturgical calendar. It also fits perfectly with the readings that have been on the Second Sunday of Easter since long before the Solemnity of Divine Mercy was formally established.

In our Gospel from last Sunday, set on “the first day of the week” in the evening, Jesus shows up in the Upper Room to a group of terrified Apostles. His first announcement is “Peace” and His first gift is mercy, not just to them and for them, but for them (the Apostles) to be able to give it away. “Whose sins you forgive are forgiven. Whose sins you retain are retained.” Jesus demonstrates that He wants forgiveness and mercy to be received by his first betrayers, and for them to give it to the ends of the world.

The encounter is clearly an establishment of the sacrament of Reconciliation, with men given the ability to forgive in His name. But even larger than that is Jesus’ global desire for all to receive His mercy. At this time in history there are no greater sinners. They knew who He was. They knew what would happen. They were the closest to Him. Yet they ran away and hid. They betrayed Him. If they can be forgiven with that closeness to Him and knowledge of Him, any one of us can be forgiven. That can never be lost on any of us.

That forgiveness received by the Apostles forms the foundation of their new life. It also forms the foundation of our new life in Him.

The old life, crusted over by sin, filled with discouragement, and keenly aware of our weaknesses and failures, is set aside for something new. That newness of life resting in the peace of Jesus’ mercy, gives us the joy and hope of both eternal life and the chance to give it to other people in the here and now. We receive the new life sacramentally in Baptism and get it renewed in Reconciliation. In that renewal, we are not only strengthened, but we are energized with the vigor to do as the first disciples did: share the truth of profound mercy and new life in Jesus through His resurrection from the dead.

That’s what mercy does. It is like rocket fuel that blasts a soul into the stratosphere to change the world. We are supposed to be new creations, swimming in the glory and mercy of God. The dust drops on our faith and accumulates when we fail to appreciate what we have and treat it like a personal possession meant to be a private comfort. We may also allow that dust to settle if we are not sure what we really believe. Something new that is not stretched, used, and given grows stagnant.

If we think about the greatest gift we have that brings us the greatest joy, most of us will come to a place where we want to share it. We want others to have it, too. Yet we are often reticent to that with our faith and new life in Christ. Some of that is cultural. We’re not supposed to talk about faith or religion.

Even with social and cultural limitations, though, I believe there is more that prevents us from following the first disciples on their journey of sharing new life. It begins in that Upper Room and the presence of the Holy Spirit that allows the Apostles to forgive. If our pride overtakes us and we believe false claims that we are unforgivable or have no need to be forgiven, then we won’t be awash in the power that pushes us to share what we have. We may not even realize it.

As an exercise in faith this week, imagine yourself as in the first wave of those forgiven by the Apostles. You have been burdened by mountains of minute rules and interpretations of them for years and spiritually you are near giving up. Then these ragtag men tell you that they betrayed the Messiah, they have been forgiven, and He wants the same for you. Embrace the gift of mercy you now have, and rejoice in the joy, hope, and promise of your new life. Then ask God to help you share it.