

April 12, 2026—Divine Mercy Sunday

Normally, the First Reading is taken from the Old Testament each Sunday. It is chosen to match a theme from the Gospel. During the Easter Season that changes; the First Reading is taken from the Acts of the Apostles from this Sunday through Pentecost. This New Testament book tells us about the life of the early Church. It gives us a glimpse into graces and struggles of a Christian in those early years.

After Jesus ascended into heaven, how did the first converts learn about the Catholic faith. They couldn't go to their local bookstore and buy a copy of the Bible! There were no New Testament books written yet. The first would be written in the winter of 50-51AD. These were the two letters of St. Paul to the Thessalonians. The last of the 27 books of the New Testament wouldn't be written until the mid-90's, the Gospel of John. At that time, all documents were written by hand on scrolls; because of that, only the very rich could afford one. Besides, the number of people who could read were few.

How did you learn the Gospel message of Jesus in the early Church? The First Reading told us that the first Christians “**devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers**”. The apostles as the first bishops and the primary teachers would preach to the people. They were the first witnesses to the doctrine of Jesus; they were the best of teachers because they had by that time received the Holy Spirit, who enlightened them to the truth. That form of divine revelation is called Sacred Tradition. The New Testament would be written, book by book, much later.

Acts told us that the first Christians supported one another even to the point of sharing the material goods that they possessed. It also said, they were devoted to the “**breaking of bread and the prayers**”. The term, “the breaking of bread” was the first name used for what we call the Holy Eucharist. The vocabulary of Christian doctrine would develop over time. Their prayer life was still connected to their Jewish roots, Acts said: “**Everyday they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes**”. Again, this bread is not ordinary bread, but the Holy Eucharist.

The Gospel told us about the first meeting of the risen Jesus with 10 of His apostles on Easter Sunday evening; Thomas was absent. The apostles were certainly not gullible; they were most reluctant even to believe eyewitnesses, such as Mary Magdelene, who was the first to see the risen Jesus. Thomas was the most unbelieving of all because he would not even believe his brother apostles.

Thomas, affectionately known as “Doubting Thomas” teaches us an important lesson. Thomas had to see the wounds of Jesus and touch them to believe. We did not see Jesus in His risen body before He ascended into glory, but as Jesus told them, “**Blessed are those who have not seen, and have believed.**” It is Holy Mother Church which has handed on the true faith and gives us the sacramental grace to believe without seeing Him in the flesh. It has long been recommended that when the priest holds up the consecrated Host, we should pray the words of St. Thomas: “**My Lord and my God.**”

This Sunday that ends the Octave of Easter is known as Divine Mercy Sunday. This title goes back to a series of apparitions of Jesus to Sister, now Saint, Faustina in the 1930’s before the outbreak of World War II. She was a Polish nun to whom Jesus entrusted the devotion of Divine Mercy. He asked that the Sunday after Easter would receive this title. Pope St. John Paul, of Polish descent, knew of this devotion and eventually fulfilled that request of Jesus to St. Faustina. Also, Jesus asked that a painting should illustrate this devotion showing Him with two rays, one red, the other white, shining forth from His chest. If you look at the last of the paintings in the sanctuary you can see a red and white ray at the top to refer to the Divine Mercy devotion.

Jesus also asked for a chaplet of Divine Mercy using the Rosary beads but with different prayers. The prayer repeated on the Hail Mary beads is, “**For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.**” In the Gospel this Sunday we heard of the institution of the Sacrament of Penance or Confession. We can also call it the **Sacrament of Mercy**. It told us that on Easter evening, the risen Jesus breathed on the apostles; this is a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit to give them authority to act in His Name. He said, “**Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.**” The priests of the Catholic Church have been doing this from the beginning, bringing the divine Mercy of Jesus to all repentant souls.

The last century was particularly a time when the mercy of God was needed, since it began with two world wars and then the spread of godless communism. One of the prayers associated with this devotion is very short, “**Jesus, I trust in You.**” The virtue of trust or hope was needed after the devastation of war and the spread of atheism, but it is also needed now. The rise of social media, the Covid lockdowns and the wars that are currently taking place in the world have caused many to lose hope. Not to mention the everyday sadnesses that comes our way.

We can say that short prayer many times in the day to build up the virtue of hope in us: **“Jesus I trust in You.”**