

## **Sunday of Divine Mercy - Lectionary: 45**

### **Reading I - [Acts 5:12-16](#)**

Many signs and wonders were done among the people at the hands of the apostles. They were all together in Solomon's portico. None of the others dared to join them, but the people esteemed them. Yet more than ever, believers in the Lord, great numbers of men and women, were added to them. Thus they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them. A large number of people from the towns in the vicinity of Jerusalem also gathered, bringing the sick and those disturbed by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.

**Responsorial Psalm - [Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24](#) R (1) Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.**

### **Reading II - [Revelation 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19](#)**

I, John, your brother, who share with you the distress, the kingdom, and the endurance we have in Jesus, found myself on the island called Patmos because I proclaimed God's word and gave testimony to Jesus. I was caught up in spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a voice as loud as a trumpet, which said, "Write on a scroll what you see." Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and when I turned, I saw seven gold lampstands and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, wearing an ankle-length robe, with a gold sash around his chest.

When I caught sight of him, I fell down at his feet as though dead. He touched me with his right hand and said, "Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, the one who lives. Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever. I hold the keys to death and the netherworld. Write down, therefore, what you have seen, and what is happening, and what will happen afterwards."

### **Gospel - [John 20:19-31](#)**

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

***Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.***

On this Divine Mercy Sunday, the emphasis is on faith and belief in the presence in our midst, and the power of our living Lord and savior Jesus Christ. His death and resurrection ushered in the era of divine mercy which *“reaches us through the heart of Christ crucified”*. <sup>JP II</sup> Not that the mercy of God has been absent from us at any time since creation, but that now divine mercy has extended to our full justification and been made children of God who are drawn into the divine life of the Trinity through baptism into Jesus.

The power and authority of the true High Priest, Jesus, has been given to the Apostles who share in the Priesthood of Jesus Christ and are therefore endowed with the same powers that Jesus had during his life here on earth, not in their own name, but in the name of Jesus their Lord. Their authority extending even to the forgiveness of sins. The institution of the sacrament of reconciliation, can be traced to here.

*As the Father has sent me, so I send you.* His mission is their mission. In today’s First Reading, we are told...*many signs and wonders were done among the people through the apostles. And that...more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women...* People came crowding in from the towns round about Jerusalem, bringing with them their sick and those tormented by unclean spirits...*they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter’s shadow, that is the Spirit of God, might fall on some of them as he came by. A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.* The Apostles proclaimed the message of Jesus as Savior and invited people repent and believe.

But not all twelve apostles had received the gift of the supernatural virtue of faith. The theological virtue which would be necessary for them to be ‘alter christus’. Thomas may have had a mind prone to be skeptical and he may have experienced a struggle to believe things Jesus was either doing or saying, but what he almost certainly suffered from was a lack of supernatural faith. Not unlike the others, prior to their encounters with the risen Lord. There’s no doubt that he had natural faith that inspired him to follow Jesus and accept what he was teaching insofar as it was reasonable, but his natural human reason had become an obstacle. He wasn’t there on that Easter Sunday, and he rejected the witness testimony of the others. He wanted convincing proof: *Unless I see...I will not believe. Unless I [can]...put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.* He uses the same strong language that Jesus had used at the Last Supper when speaking with Peter about his refusal to let Jesus wash his feet. Scripture doesn’t tell us whether, when Jesus appeared the next week, Thomas did in fact touch Jesus’ wounds, but it does indicate that when he exclaimed ‘My Lord and My God, it was not based on the evidence of his senses, a product of his natural reason. As was the case when Jesus appeared to others, it was then that he received from God, infused supernatural faith that enabled his intellect to grasp the Truth being revealed to him in that moment.

Thomas was also not so different from the others who refused to accept the testimony of those to whom Jesus first appeared. Thomas’ greater weakness may have been his pride and lack of humility resulting in a fear of being misled by others, of being wrong about Jesus, of being lied to by Jesus. Although famously, this situation led to Thomas forever being referred to as ‘doubting Thomas’ and he became somewhat of an icon of skeptics, it is certain that he did not have ‘doubts’ in the theological sense. That kind of doubt would have meant that he had received the truth revealed to him from a supernatural source, that he had accepted that truth with divine and supernatural faith and then allowed it to wither. In the strict sense, ‘doubt’ is a sin against the infused supernatural virtue of Faith. As the Catechism puts it: *“Voluntary doubt about the faith disregards or refuses to hold as true what God has revealed, and the Church proposes for belief. Involuntary doubt refers to hesitation in believing, difficulty in overcoming objections connected*

*with the faith, or also anxiety aroused by its obscurity. If deliberately cultivated doubt can lead to spiritual blindness*". #2088 This follows from the nature of supernatural faith itself, which St. Thomas Aquinas defined as "*an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace*". cf., CCC, #155; ST, II-II, q.2, a.9

In any person, the virtue of faith, which "*is the first stage of human salvation, the foundation and root of all justification,*" results only from God's free initiative to draw him or her into the divine life. The virtue of faith is an infused [habitus](#) that enables the human person to attain the transcendent God who is the First Truth. God as First Truth constitutes the formal object of theological faith.<sup>1</sup> Naturally manufactured faith, reliant as it is on natural reason, is radically inferior to infused supernatural faith. Natural faith can have as a supernatural object— God — but it is received naturally — it is "acquired" — by natural human acts. It may be "about" God, but it is "of" man. Natural faith is arrived at: by a logical conclusion: "proofs" of God come to by the use of reason; by habit learned in early childhood through parents, culture, upbringing; a presumption accepted because of the example or testimony of others who are respected; by seeing or hearing about a miracle or miracles attributed to the object of faith (God); etc.

It can also happen that a person who has received the infused supernatural virtue of Faith, will tend to prefer mere natural reasoning abilities. Fr. Louis Lallemand, SJ said, "*It is truly sad to see how, in religion, some, and often even the majority, guide themselves only by human reason and natural prudence, scarcely using faith, except so far as not to go against it. They apply themselves to the perfecting of reason and good sense without taking the trouble to increase in faith.*"<sup>2</sup>

So also, some 400 years later, Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, wrote of this failure to live fully in the supernatural virtues: "*All the faithful doubtless believe in what God has revealed, but many live very little by the supernatural mysteries which are the principal object of faith. They think more often of the truths of religion that reason can attain — the existence of God, His Providence, the immortality of the soul — or they go no farther than the outward, sensible aspect of Christian worship. Often our faith is still too weak to make us truly live by the mysteries of the Blessed Trinity, the Incarnation, the redemption, the Eucharist, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in our souls. These are holy formulas, often repeated with veneration, but they are pale and lifeless, and their object is, as it were, lost in the depths of the heavens. These supernatural mysteries have not sufficiently become for us the light of life, the orientation point of our judgments, the habitual norm of our thoughts. Likewise, the motive for our belief in these mysteries is undoubtedly the fact that God has revealed them, but we dwell excessively on several secondary motives which aid us: first, these mysteries are the rather generally accepted belief of our family and our country; next, we see a certain harmony between supernatural dogmas and the natural truths accessible to reason; lastly, we have some slight experience of God's action in our souls, and this helps us to believe.*"<sup>3</sup>

Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange points us to the consequences of neglecting, even ignoring, the treasure of one's infused and supernatural virtues, faith in particular, preferring instead to go first to what is secondary - the natural and the acquired: "*According to this conception, the certitude of our supernatural faith in the Blessed Trinity, the incarnation, and other mysteries, would rest formally in the last analysis on the inferior though morally certain knowledge which our unaided reason can have of the signs of revelation and of the marks of the Church. The act of faith would be a sort of reasoning, formally based on a certitude of inferior order. Often this certitude rests merely on the human testimony of our parents and of our pastors, for very few of the faithful can make a critical study of the origins of Christianity. The act of theological faith thus conceived is no longer infallibly certain, and preserves almost nothing that is supernatural and mysterious.*

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<sup>1</sup> Romanus Cessario, [Christian Faith and the Theological Life](#) (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 55, 57-59

<sup>2</sup> Fr. Louis Lallemand, SJ, *The Spiritual Doctrine* (London: Levey, Robson, and Franklyn, 1855), Ch. 3, Art. I, "Of Faith".

<sup>3</sup> Fr. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, vol. 2 (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1948), 301.

*It is no longer evident why interior grace is absolutely necessary not only to confirm it but to produce it. This last point was definitely defined by the Church against the Pelagians and the semi-Pelagians.”<sup>4</sup>*

The lack of absolute certitude concerning issues of one’s own faith — and hope — and charity — then has a serious consequence in the life of disciple of Christ. The very foundations of a person’s life are like a house built on sand, and not the rock. Mere moral certitude is sand, compared to the firm rock of God’s own testimony. Moral certitude is far less certain than the faith we are called to, *“Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must suppose that a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord.”* James 1:2-7

For those who have this gift of supernatural faith but wonder about its authenticity, Cardinal Newman wrote that *“ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt”*. We can question, ponder, analyze, mull over, struggle with any number of the articles of faith, but to struggle in faith toward belief is not the same as doubt. The illumination that accompanies the theological virtue of faith plays a central role in the life of every believer. St. John of the Cross wrote that, *“As our faith grows more intense, so does our union with God.”* Indeed, the supernatural virtue of faith introduces us into an authentically personal encounter and relationship with God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From its earliest moments, the Christian tradition taught that this supernatural or theological faith embodies a specific form of intellectual activity, that it involves a search for truth.<sup>5</sup>

Since faith is a theological virtue, received as gift from God which is infused into our hearts, we are enabled to grow closer to Him. As we take actions to unite ourselves closer to God and His will, God wants to encourage this and increases our Faith to help us. When you’re Baptized, whether as a small infant or an adult, you are marked as a Christian, allowing you to make steps toward deeper and stronger Faith. When you receive the sacrament of Confirmation, the Holy Spirit infuses Faith more abundantly into your heart, amongst the many other gifts from the Holy Spirit. Frequently receiving the Eucharist will increase your Faith by leaps and bounds. Confession removes the sins that keep you from being faithful and holds you back. We can strengthen our relationship with God through doing works for God and through actions such as prayer.

Frequent prayer is needed to increase Faith. Prayer is a cooperation with the Holy Spirit, calling you to speak and to listen to God. When we decide not to pray, we are refusing this call from the Holy Spirit, and in turn are choosing to not have an increase in Faith. Prayer is a conversation with God, and since Faith is your relationship with God, you need to talk to Him! You cannot expect a relationship to grow without communication.

Although what is believed surpasses the abilities of unaided human intelligence, the one who believes acquires a true knowledge of divine truth, and this illumination changes the whole conduct of a believer’s life.<sup>6</sup> Knowledge in faith unites us to *“God, the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ”*, Col. 1:3 for through faith we come to see the Truth, though for now we see it, as St. Paul says, *“in a mirror, dimly”*.<sup>1 Cor. 13:12</sup> This right practice of the faith depends upon right belief, which itself is impossible without the addition of proper

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<sup>4</sup> Fr. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 2003), 63.

<sup>5</sup> Romanus Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 49-50.

<sup>6</sup> Romanus Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 50.

instruction in the faith. However, this will not happen without the spiritual formation of those who receive the gift of faith in Christ, which primarily takes place within the Church.<sup>7</sup> Learning more about the teachings of the Church will also increase your Faith. The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives wonderful insights on what the Church teaches and why. This source and writings from the saints are very helpful. But of course, the most helpful thing to read is Scripture.

Stated simply, we must pray to God for the grace — the actual grace — moment by moment, day by day — for the “bread for the day” by which we can live the life we have been given to live in Him. The infused supernatural virtues will remain in potency and capability, until and unless they are actuated by actual grace. We are called to holiness, and we are empowered to achieve holiness by grace entrusted to the Church, in our sacraments.

*"Tell souls not to place within their own hearts obstacles to My mercy, which so greatly wants to act within them. My mercy works in all those hearts which open their doors to it. Both the sinner and the righteous person have need of My mercy. Conversion, as well as perseverance, is a grace of My mercy. Let souls who are striving for perfection particularly adore My mercy, because the abundance of graces which I grant them flows from My mercy. I desire that these souls distinguish themselves by boundless trust in My mercy. I myself will attend to the sanctification of such souls. I will provide them with everything they will need to attain sanctity. The graces of My mercy are drawn by means of one vessel only, and that is-trust. The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive. Souls that trust boundlessly are a great comfort to Me, because I pour all the treasures of My graces into them. I rejoice that they ask for much, because it is My desire to give much, very much. On the other hand, I am sad when souls ask for little, when they narrow their hearts." — Jesus to St. Faustina, 1577*

### Reflection Questions

1. Consider the significance of Divine Mercy Sunday in the context of faith and belief, elaborating on how Christ's death and resurrection ushered in a new era of God's mercy.
2. Consider the distinction between natural faith and infused supernatural faith, explaining why the latter is presented as essential for a deep and authentic relationship with God. Use the example of Thomas to illustrate this difference.
3. Explore the various means by which the text suggests believers can cultivate and strengthen their infused supernatural faith, providing specific examples and explaining the rationale behind each practice.
4. Consider the nature of doubt in relation to theological faith, as defined in the text and the Catechism. Differentiate between struggling with belief and the sin of voluntary doubt, and discuss the role of humility in maintaining faith.
5. Consider the relationship between God's mercy, grace, and the theological virtue of faith in the life of a Christian. How do these elements interrelate to facilitate spiritual growth and holiness?

### Glossary of Key Terms

- **Divine Mercy:** God's love and compassion extended towards humanity, particularly emphasized after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- **Faith (Infused Supernatural Virtue):** A theological virtue, given by God as a free gift, which enables the intellect to assent to divine truth by the command of the will moved by grace. It allows one to believe truths that surpass human understanding.
- **Natural Faith:** Belief based on human reason, experience, or the testimony of others, rather than a direct gift from God. It can have God as its object but is acquired through natural means.

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<sup>7</sup> Romanus Cessario, [Christian Faith and the Theological Life](#) (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 10.

- **Theological Virtues:** The virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which are infused by God into the soul and direct one toward God.
- **Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession):** A sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ through which sins committed after baptism can be forgiven.
- **Alter Christus:** Latin for "another Christ," often used to describe the role of priests who act in the person of Christ, particularly in the sacraments.
- **Grace (Actual Grace):** Divine assistance given by God to enable people to perform good actions and avoid evil in specific circumstances.
- **Grace (Sanctifying Grace):** A habitual, supernatural gift that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God and to act by his love.
- **Habitus:** A stable disposition or quality of the soul that makes it ready to operate in a certain way. In this context, faith is an infused habitus.
- **Pelagianism/Semi-Pelagianism:** Heretical beliefs that either denied the necessity of grace for salvation (Pelagianism) or held that humans could initiate salvation with their own efforts, with God's grace acting as a supplement (Semi-Pelagianism).
- **Moral Certitude:** A high degree of probability that something is true, based on human reasoning or reliable testimony, but lacking the absolute certainty of divine revelation.
- **Infused Habitus:** A stable disposition or quality of the soul that is directly given by God, such as the theological virtues.
- **First Truth:** A theological term referring to God as the ultimate source of all truth, the object of theological faith.
- **Actual Grace:** Temporary divine assistance given by God to perform a particular good act or avoid a particular evil.