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Pope St. John Paul II declared that this Sunday, the octave day of Easter, should be Divine Mercy Sunday. It is a time for us to focus on our need for God's mercy, and the abundance of mercy he showers upon us.

With the exception of the angels among us, which would be just the infants and little children, we often shock ourselves with how easily we go off the deep end, losing our tempers, our patience, engaging tongue before brain, doing that which we said we would no longer do, again and again, and not doing those acts of charity that we know we need to perform. Without rattling off a long list of negatives, suffice it to say that we are all frail human beings.

Sometimes, though, we hide behind our humanity to justify our actions. We say, "I'm only human, you know." But that is never an acceptable excuse for our behavior. We are not only human. We are also spiritual. Jesus died on the cross so we could share in His resurrection, so we can have a spiritual life. Through the grace of our baptism, our acceptance of the New Life of the Resurrection, God dwells within each of us. We are infinitely more than human. We are sons and daughters of God.

Our God sent His Son to become one of us. *One of us.* The Fourth Eucharistic Prayer says that He became a man like us in all things but sin. That means that Jesus never chose to do something wrong or refused to do something that needed to be done to reflect God's love. It also means that Jesus knows what it is like to have our patience strained. Just think about the antics of the Twelve before they received the special Grace of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Jesus also knew how easy it is to lose hope when a crisis hits. Think about the cross. Along with the physical pain, Jesus knew what it was like to feel completely abandoned. All of us suffer from feelings that we are all alone. Even the mother in a house full of children and a caring husband often feels all alone. Jesus felt alone too. But this was more than that, He felt abandoned. With the exception of Mary, John and a small handful of people, He was all alone on Calvary. Yet when He called out the beginning of *Psalms 22* from the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me," He was praying the psalm that declares that no matter what the world is doing to Him, His Father would never abandon Him.

They have pierced my hands and my feet,  
I can number all my bones.  
They stare and gloat over me,  
They divide my clothes among them  
And for my garments they cast lots,

But you, O Lord, be not far off!  
O You, my help, hasten to my aid.....

And I will tell of your name to my brethren....

You who fear the Lord, praise Him,  
You sons of Jacob glorify Him and  
Stand in awe of Him, you sons of Israel.

Jesus also knew how the world tempts us to hate and how easy it is to take a small step and go from disagreeing with another person to hating that person because of his or her opinions. He must look at us Americans in 2021 and say, "People, disagree in your political positions if you must, but stop being hateful to each other and start respecting each other."

Jesus even knew what it was like to wake up in the morning and feel crabby. Moods are part of our human condition and Jesus was one of us in all things but sin. Granted, He controlled His moods, and we often don't control our moods, but He did know that bad moods seem to come from nowhere. He also shared our other frailties. The Lord knew the temptation to tell lies to get someone off His back. He didn't; we often do. He also knew the temptation to take what was not His when He was hungry. Jesus experienced every frailty of human nature without exception. But He did not act on them.

Back to today's Gospel. He knew how Thomas was frustrated with the other disciples and how he was disappointed that Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was followed by His exit from the city carrying a cross less than a week later. The Lord knew what Thomas was going through and forgave him. The Lord knows what each of us is going through in our lives and forgives us. Well, He forgives us as long as we are willing to take a step outside of ourselves and our wants, and recognize our need for His Presence in our lives. On this Divine Mercy Sunday we are reminded that when we say with our lives as well as with our tongues, "You, Jesus, are my Lord and my God," then are we only human? No, we are not only human. His grace allows us to be infinitely more than just human. Through His mercy we can be the spiritual beings that He created us to be.

"I am not good enough," all of us are inclined to say, particularly when we know we need to serve God in the Church, in our home, our workplace, our school or our neighborhood. "I am not good enough" we say to ourselves and others not just to have an excuse for avoiding something, but far deeper, because we know our own frailty. Parents say deep within themselves, "I am not good enough to be the spiritual leader my children need." The young say, "I am not good enough to lead my peers to Christ." I, a priest as well as everyone in the priesthood or aspiring to be a priest say, "I am not good enough to be the priest the people need." But we are wrong. All of us are wrong. We are all good enough. He makes us good enough. This is the message of Divine Mercy Sunday.

II by Fr. Tommy Lane

What a joy for the disciples gathered together on Easter Sunday evening to see Jesus risen from the dead. (John 20:19-31) To be honest we would all like to share this same joy by seeing the risen Jesus. But in fact we already do have this joy because we can see Jesus with the eyes of faith. While we do not see Jesus as the ten disciples on Easter Sunday evening, in our hearts we know that Jesus is with us, in our hearts we see Jesus. (There were ten disciples gathered together because Judas was no more and Thomas was absent.) When we have the joy in our hearts of knowing that Jesus is with us and faith in him what a difference it makes to our lives. Just notice the difference between the ten disciples and how grumpy Thomas was when he returned. What a contrast between the ten disciples and Thomas. The ten disciples had faith in Jesus and received his peace - Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19) - while Thomas did not receive the peace of Jesus, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." (John 20:25) Think of the sadness it must have caused the ten disciples because Thomas refused to believe. They knew he was missing out on the greatest treasure of life, Jesus. But because Thomas was stubborn and insisted on seeing with his eyes, instead of believing in faith, he must have had a very sad week until Jesus came again on the following Sunday evening, that is the evening of today (John 20:26). When we live life with Jesus we are happy, when we shut Jesus out of our lives we can never expect to be happy. There is a very beautiful line in Rev 3:20. It is Jesus who is talking and he issues this beautiful invitation, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me." Jesus issues this invitation to each of us also. Let us open the doors of our hearts to Jesus and let him in to dine with us. Who wants to be unhappy for a week like Thomas? Who wants to be unhappy for a whole lifetime like Thomas? No one, yet how many are deluded by all the attractions of this world, by what we call the American dream. The American dream does not bring happiness; only the peace of Jesus brings happiness. The Gospel passage today concluded with John telling us why he wrote, "that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name." (John 20:31). We can have life only in the name of Jesus. The ten disciples through faith in Jesus learned to cope with his absence. The second reading told us,

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"the victory that conquers the world is our faith. Who is the victor over the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4-5)

Those who have faith are united very deeply, more deeply than by anything else. We heard in the first reading, "The community of believers was of one heart and mind..." (Acts 4:32) What a beautiful description. "The community of believers was of one heart and mind..." Faith in Jesus unites people like nothing else.

Since we do not want to be unhappy for a week like Thomas or a lifetime how can we find this peace of Jesus that the ten apostles had? We can see Jesus with the eyes of faith every time we celebrate the Eucharist here. Remember what the two disciples said on the road to Emmaus after they realized they had just celebrated the Eucharist with Jesus, "Were not our hearts burning within us..." (Luke 24:32) We meet Jesus in the Eucharist here every Sunday. Just as on the road to Emmaus, we listen to the Scriptures and their explanation, and then we receive the Body of Jesus. Let our hearts burn within us each time we celebrate the Eucharist here. Just as Jesus met the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and uplifted them Jesus comes to meet us in every Eucharist and uplifts us. Those who do not come do not have the Eucharist at home. They miss out on meeting Jesus.

Another way in which we receive the peace of Jesus and have him in our hearts - so that we do not remain in the sad and pitiful state Thomas was in during that Easter week - is when we receive the mercy and forgiveness of Jesus. If there is anything in our lives that is not right it is preventing us from full union with Jesus and from enjoying fully the peace he offers to us. And so in our Gospel today Jesus gave his apostles the ability to forgive sins,

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"Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." (John 20:22-23)

Some say, "Why do we have to confess our sins to a priest?" This is a good question, seeking to probe deeper into the mysteries of our faith. The answer to this question is found in the words of Jesus to his apostles in the Gospel today.

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"Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." (John 20:22-23)

It was Jesus himself who commissioned his apostles to forgive sins. Since bread and wine change into the Body and Blood of Jesus through the prayer of the priest why does it seem strange that God would also use priests to forgive sins in his name? Since God has commissioned priests to baptize children and so make them sons and daughters of God why does it seem strange that priests can also forgive sins in the name of God? Since God brings healing to the sick when they are anointed by priests during the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick why does it seem strange that God would also use priests to forgive sins in his name? I could give many other reasons but I hope we can see that God has no problem with being humble to allow his priests to forgive sins in his name, even though we too are sinners. God does not have a problem with that. If we do, why? Is it because we are not as humble as God. Is it because we think God

should do things differently? Do we really know better than God? God has chosen his priests to bring his sacraments to us including his forgiveness. To have peace in our hearts and the joy of Jesus, let us make frequent use of this most beautiful and wonderful sacrament which heals our souls and restores us to unity with Jesus again after we have turned away from him. We do not want to be sad like Thomas during Easter week, we want to have the peace of Jesus that the ten apostles received on Easter Sunday evening.

Following the revelations of Jesus to St. Faustina in Poland we call today [Divine Mercy Sunday](#). We celebrate the mercy of Jesus in a special way today. We prepared for this celebration by a novena of praying the Chaplet of Divine Mercy beginning on Good Friday. Our celebration concludes this afternoon with a special Mass during which the image of Jesus, Divine Mercy, will be venerated, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation will be available today. Indeed we are reminded of the image of Divine Mercy by our second reading today stating that Jesus came by water and blood (1 John 5:6). Jesus said to St. Faustina, "Tell ailing mankind to draw close to my merciful heart and I will fill them with peace. Mankind will not find consolation until it turns with confidence to my mercy and love." This reminds me of the Gospel today. The disciples were gathered in the Upper Room and were afraid. But Jesus came to them with his message of peace, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19) They were no longer afraid. It is like that for us too. We will not find peace until we find it in Jesus. Jesus' message for each of us today is to find our peace in him. The Gospel was written, "that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name." (John 20:31). We can have life only in Jesus.

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### III

A few years ago there was a contest to judge the funniest joke in the world. The winning joke went like this:

Two men were out hunting in the woods. Suddenly one man clutches his chest, gasps for breath, and drops to the ground. His friend immediately gets out his cell phone and dials 911. He tells the emergency operator, "My friend just died. What should I do?" The operator says, "Take it easy sir. First, make sure that he's dead."

There are a few seconds of silence followed by a gun shot. The man gets back on the phone and says, "Okay, what's next?" \*

Well, that's one way to make certain someone's dead.

Certainty is very difficult to attain in this world. There always seems to be room for doubt. However, doubt can be disheartening. So some wise people have taken doubt to its logical conclusion and begun to doubt their doubts. And they have found their way to a most satisfying life.

Such a man was the author Robert Louis Stevenson. Like many young people in his early years Stevenson rebelled against his upbringing. He was raised in Scotland in a very strict Calvinist home. As a college student he quickly shed his rigid upbringing, which he called "the deadliest gag and wet blanket that can be laid on a man," and adopted a thoroughly bohemian lifestyle. He called himself a "youthful atheist."

As he became older, however, Robert Louis Stevenson began to have "doubts about his doubts." He came to see that for all its claim to wisdom, the world had no satisfying answers to the deepest questions of life. Later Robert Louis Stevenson would write, "There is a God who is manifest for those who care to look for him."

In the later years of his life Stevenson was a man of deep and profound faith. Toward the end of his life he described his religious outlook as a "cast iron faith."

Our Scripture Lesson from John's Gospel is about the world's most famous doubter. You already know his name.

The news of Jesus' resurrection spread quickly among his disciples. You can imagine the quickened pulse and the rapid, excited speech of those who had encountered the risen Christ as they shared their experience with others. You can also imagine the difficulty that those who heard their story had in believing them.

The first recipients of the good news of Easter were his male disciples and, typically, they considered it the idle nonsense of distraught and hysterical women and did not believe it. But as more and more of the disciples and followers of Jesus encountered the risen Christ the stories gained credibility.

The most famous holdout was a disciple named Thomas, also called the Twin. "Unless I see the print of the nails in his hands," said Thomas, "and place my fingers in the print of the nails, and unless I can put my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Many of us have had times in our lives when we could identify with Thomas. We too have rebelled. We too have doubted. Here is something you need to know: Doubt is one of the most important tools that God uses to produce mighty men and women of faith.

I worry about someone who says to me, "I have never doubted for one moment my faith in God." My friend, are you alive? Do you have a brain? Do you ever use it? I am convinced that God has deliberately placed many obstacles to faith in our world. If He meant for us to walk with utter certainty, why does He not reveal Himself more clearly?

Woody Allen once said that he would have no difficulty believing in God. All God would have to do would be to deposit \$1,000,000 in a secret Swiss bank account in Woody's name.

We might not go that far, but it is a good question why God does not give us an understandable answer to such questions as why good people suffer? It would be so much easier to believe then. And why didn't God give us a guidebook that is not open to as many diverse interpretations as the Bible? Why doesn't He just speak to us in a clear voice at the close of the service and reveal Himself so that, like those early disciples, we could leave here and tell our friends, "I have seen the Lord."

It seems clear to me that God intends for us to struggle with the great questions of life. It may be that such a struggle is essential to a strong, mature faith. Never to have doubted is never to have taken the walk of faith seriously.

Do you remember Christian in John Bunyan's classic portrayal of the life of faith which he titled, *Pilgrim's Progress*? Christian's journey to the Celestial City is not at all smooth and easy. Rather, his way is filled with discouragements and detours.

He becomes bogged down in the Slough of Despond and lost in Bypass Meadow. He spends some time in Doubting Castle as well as in Vanity Fair.

Bunyan is trying to say to us through the use of allegory that faith was never intended to be easily attained. This world was intended to be a training school to produce strong souls. God uses obstacles to train us--to make us strong. Doubt is one of those obstacles.

Let me use an analogy from the world of commercial fishing.

Years ago seafood companies had a perplexing problem with the shipment of codfish to consumers who lived inland.

Shippers discovered that frozen codfish loses its flavor in the shipping process.

Shipping live codfish is no better. In the holding tanks they become soft and mushy and later tasteless.

So somebody came up with the idea of throwing in some catfish into each of the tanks of live cod. Catfish and codfish are natural enemies. In a quest for survival, the codfish are kept in constant motion as they seek to escape the catfish. Thereby these cod are kept in peak condition from the ocean to your dinner table.

In a sense, doubt and frustration and other such obstacles are the catfish that God has placed in our tank to keep us swimming, to keep us at our best. There is far more hope for the honest doubter than for the person who says, "Of course, I believe," and never really struggles with the meaning and the misery of life.

That wonderful writer Frederick Buechner, put it this way, "Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith; they keep faith alive and moving." Doubt is one of God's most effective tools for producing mighty men and women of faith.

However, in order to experience the true joy that God intends for each of His children, there must come a time when we begin to doubt our doubts. Doubting our faith is easy, but doubting our doubts is far more profitable.

In *Pilgrim's Progress* there is another character named Mr. Ready-to-Halt. Mr. Ready-to-Halt was so hung up on his doubts that he went all the way to the Celestial City on crutches. He got there but it was a torturous journey with very little joy.

Much of the doubt that we experience in young adulthood is a need to rebel against our upbringing. Again, I suspect this is part of the plan of God. If parents and children didn't disagree on something, offspring would never leave home.

Jesus did not condemn the prodigal for leaving. All of us must do it sometime. That is part of the maturation process. However, one lesson that we learn from the prodigal is that we don't want to spend a lifetime in a pigpen either. Spiritual maturity comes when we are ready to doubt our doubts.

J. Wallace Hamilton once told a story about a Russian girl who was brought up as an atheist. She had taken a government examination and, like all students, was worried about some of the answers she had given.

One particular question on the exam had bothered her. The question was this: "What is the inscription on the Samaritan Wall?"

She had written the prescribed answer: "Religion is the opiate of the people."

This, of course, was the famous anti-religion declaration of the author of communism, Karl Marx. But the girl wasn't sure of her answer, so she walked seven miles to the Samaritan Wall to check it out and, sure enough, there it was: "Religion is the opiate of the people."

Greatly relieved, she forgot for a moment her upbringing, and exclaimed, "Thank God! I had it right."

Well, there are times when even an atheist must thank somebody!

Communist governments, whether in Russia or China or Cuba or anywhere else on earth, have discovered after generations of propaganda that it is very difficult to purge people of their belief in God. There is something within the human heart that is ever reaching outward and upward. There is something within our very nature that senses an incompleteness to life.

We see through the glass darkly, but somehow we sense that the room into which we are seeking to peer is not empty. This world is far too wonderful to have occurred by chance. There is within us a hunger that only a relationship with the Divine can satisfy. It is very difficult for most of us not to "doubt our doubts."

But there is a final thing to be said. Christian faith can only be analyzed from the inside. Here is where those who have made a god of the scientific method are going to have a problem. You cannot find God with the most powerful telescope ever built. You cannot find him with a slide rule, or a test tube or an enormous computer. There is only one way to find God and that is to take a step of faith, entrust your life to Him, and enter into a daily walk with Him as Savior and Lord of your life. I cannot prove to you the existence of God, but you can prove Him to yourself.

Let's use an analogy. Could I prove to you that love exists? A scientist could attach electrodes to the skin of a person in love and measure the pulse, the respiration and the blood pressure of a person in the presence of their beloved. But that would not prove love. Too much caffeine that morning at breakfast might cause the same bodily reactions.

The only way you and I can ever prove love is to have experienced what it is to love and to be loved.

So it is with faith. There are only two ways that the existence of a loving God can be proved. The first is by the testimony of others. We can say with utter certainty that there



have been millions of persons who have experienced God as a reality in their lives. That is one proof--though it will not satisfy the skeptic.

The most conclusive evidence of the existence of God is to experience Him yourself. As the old song says, "You ask me how I know he lives, he lives within my heart."

The richest man in the world, Croesus, once asked the wisest man in the world, Thales, "What is God?"

The philosopher asked for a day in which to deliberate, and then for another, and then for another, and another, and another--and at length confessed that he was not able to answer, that the longer he deliberated, the more difficult it was for him to frame an answer.

Tertullian, the early Church Father, eagerly seized upon this incident and said it was an example of the world's ignorance of God outside of Christ. "There," he exclaimed, "is the wisest man in the world, and he cannot tell you who God is. But the most ignorant [workman] among the Christians knows God, and is able to make him known unto others."

Tertullian was making this very point. Christian faith must be experienced from the inside. Faith grows as you walk daily with the Master. It is unlikely that Thomas the doubter would ever have experienced the faith if he had not remained among the other believers. And his sense of loss would have been profound. He would never have experienced the joy and the relief he experienced when he fell to his knees at the feet of Jesus and exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!"

What happened to Thomas after his experience with the risen Christ? His later career is wrapped in mystery and legend. An apocryphal book, called *The Legend of Thomas*, claims to give his history. It says that when the disciples divided up the world to conquer it for Jesus, Thomas received India. And there in India Thomas died for the faith that he once had doubted.

Indeed, in South India today you will find a church called the Thomist Church of South India which claims that Thomas was its founder. Thomas dropped his doubts at the pierced feet of Jesus and became one of those by whose testimony we have the faith today.

Thomas was a doubter. He had to see for himself. Jesus did not condemn him for that. However, Jesus did say, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." Doubt is an obstacle that, when overcome, can cause us to have a deeper, richer, more meaningful faith. In the struggle for meaning the wise person learns to doubt his doubts. The way to prove faith is to surrender yourself to the Lordship of Christ, walk in his way and experience his love for yourself.