

Second Sunday of Easter, Cycle A
Sunday of Divine Mercy
Acts 2: 42-47
Psalm 118: 2-4, 13-15, 22-24
1 Peter 1: 3-9
John 20: 19-31
Rev. Charles B. Gordon, C.S.C.
The Garaventa Center
The University of Portland

In Ron Hansen's marvelous short story, "Playland," an enormous pelican flaps down onto a beach and approaches one of the main characters. To quote from the story, the bird "waddled toward him, her wings amorously fanning out to a span of ten feet or more as she struck herself thumpingly on the breast with her beak until a spot of red appeared on her feathers." When we read "Playland" in my Catholic writing course here at the University of Portland, the students realize right away that the author means the big bird to have symbolic significance. There is usually someone in the room who recognizes that the pelican is a figure of Christ. The tradition apparently goes back to an early Greek Christian text called *The Physiologus*, which became one of the most popular works of the European Middle Ages. *The Physiologus* is a collection of stories about animals, to which Christian allegorical interpretations are attached. According to the story as it was received into popular culture, the pelican pecks at her own breast until it bleeds and feeds her chicks with her blood. This powerful maternal image was taken as a reference to Christ and the Eucharist. The allegory works, not just because of the reference to blood as food, but because the story reflects our experience that Our Lord's love for us knows no limits. It's just the kind of thing that Jesus would do. Of course we have just

celebrated the consummate expression of this truth in the Easter Triduum. By his Passion, Christ demonstrates that no sacrifice for us is too great.

Today's Gospel reveals that the same is true after the Resurrection. When the other disciples tell Thomas that the Risen Lord has appeared to them in his absence, Thomas replies "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." When Christ appears to the disciples again a week later, Thomas is present. Our Lord says to him, "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." I think it's important to realize that Christ is not being sarcastic or ironic here. It's not as if he's saying, "For heaven's sake, Thomas, what do I have to do, draw you a picture?" No, he's saying, in effect, "Thomas, if that's what it's going to take to make you believe, fine. Get over here." And surely it is this attitude on Our Lord's part, this willingness to suffer any indignity for the sake of a single soul, that far more than the nail marks themselves, causes Thomas to recognize him and to cry out, "My Lord and my God." It's just the kind of thing that Jesus would say – just the kind of thing that he would do.

Christ responds to Thomas's expression of faith by asking, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." That's us. We're the one's who've not seen the marks in Our Lord's body, yet believe. But, with eyes of faith, we can recognize in one another the kind of things that he would say – the kind of things that he would do. We can find Christ reflected in ten thousand places, even in a loving mother bird.