

Second Sunday of Easter, Cycle B  
Divine Mercy Sunday  
Act of the Apostles 4:32-35  
Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24  
1 John 5:1-6  
John 20:19-31  
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Our first reading describes how the members of the Church in Jerusalem shared everything they had. The very first line of the passage helps us understand what motivates their extraordinary generosity. We read, “The community of believers was of one heart and mind.” I think we are being told more in this line than we might realize. To say they were “of one heart and mind” means more here than “they were all pulling together,” or “everyone was on the same page.” The meaning is more literal than that. They really *are* of one heart and one mind – the heart and mind of Christ. Each individual is an instance of the heart and mind of Our Lord. That’s what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Our second reading, from 1 John, conveys something of the same meaning. We are told that, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God.” Consider that last phrase, “begotten by God.” When we hear the word “begotten,” we think immediately of the Nicene Creed’s affirmation that Jesus Christ is the “only begotten” Son of God, who shares the very essence of the Father. In scripture too, “begotten” betokens a particular, privileged, spiritual relationship. So, when John asserts, “everyone who believes in Jesus Christ is begotten by God,” he’s telling us that all believers share Christ’s own relationship with the Father. Again, there’s an identity being posited between the

individual believer and Christ himself. The point is reiterated, later in the passage, when John asks a question: “Who indeed is the victor over the world?” The obvious answer is Jesus Christ. By his Passion, death and Resurrection *Christ* is victorious over the world. But John’s answer is different. He says that the one who believes in Jesus “is the victor over the world.” The individual believer is *the* victor over the world. Again, an identity is being asserted between the believer and Christ. It is the consequence of being filled with the Holy Spirit. “The Spirit is the one who testifies, and the Spirit is truth.”

Our Gospel offers confirmation of what we’ve already learned. The risen Christ tells the disciples, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Again, more is being said here than we ordinarily hear. It’s not just that the Father sending Christ and Christ sending the disciples are similar because they are both ‘sendings’ and they are for a similar purpose. No, the implication is that when Christ sends the disciples, the same thing is happening as when the Father sends him. The sending of the disciples is another occasion of the sending of Jesus by the Father. And so we find another instance of an identity being drawn between Christ and believers. This time the connection with the Holy Spirit is explicit. Our Lord says to the disciples, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” Now, every Jew knew that only God could forgive sins. Jesus’ claim to forgive sins during his earthly ministry scandalized his contemporaries because, as they saw it, Jesus was essentially claiming to be God. Now, incredibly, precisely as a consequence of receiving the Holy Spirit, the disciples are being endowed with this hitherto divine prerogative. Henceforth, when they forgive or retain sins, they will be acting *as* Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the perfect love between the Father and the Son – the very love that creates and sustains the universe. When, in baptism, we receive the Holy Spirit, that love becomes part of us. From God’s perspective, it’s the most significant thing about us, so when the Father sees us, the Father sees the Son. That is the ultimate source of the identity we have found in our readings between the individual believer and Christ. This, in the end, is what Easter means for us. Little wonder the season fills us with inexpressible gratitude, deep humility and profound joy, for it is no longer we who live, but the risen Christ who lives in us. (See Gal. 2:20)