

Third Sunday of Easter, Cycle B
Acts of the Apostles 3:13-15, 17-19
Psalm 4:2, 4, 7-8, 9
1 John 2:1-5A
Luke 24:35-48
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Divine Mercy Sunday was last week. These readings would have served us well then, for divine mercy is a pronounced theme in them all. In our first reading, Peter is taking the people to task for their treatment of Jesus. He accuses them of handing Jesus over to Pilate. Then, when Pilate was ready to release him, they preferred to be granted the release of a murderer. They have disowned the Holy and Righteous One. They have put to death the Author of life. But God has raised him from the dead, and the apostles are his witnesses. Now the witnesses have testified. The terrible charges have been made. By raising Jesus from the dead, God has settled the rights and wrongs of the matter. It only remains to hear the sentence. What might that sentence be? What could be sufficient punishment for putting to death the Author of Life? Peter speaks: "Yes, I know you and your leaders acted out of ignorance. Turn to God that your sins may be washed away." So the gist of Peter's remarks is, "You have committed the worst imaginable crime against us, and against God. Therefore... repent, and become one of us. He offers, not a blanket condemnation, but a call to repentance, and an invitation to fellowship. Clearly, in this instance, mercy trumps vengeance.

In our second reading, John says, in effect, "Do not sin, but if you *do* sin, remember that in Jesus we have the expiation of our sins, and of the sins of the whole world. So, rather than condemn sinners, John offers a

word of consolation to them, reminding them that by his Passion, death and Resurrection, Jesus Christ has already atoned for their sins. And so Divine Mercy foregoes another opportunity for condemnation.

In our Gospel, when Jesus appears to the disciples, they think they are seeing a ghost. And if it *is* a ghost, it's not just any ghost. It's the ghost of the man they abandoned and betrayed. Their first instinct could well be that he has come back to condemn them – to do them harm. No wonder they are terrified. Christ convinces them that he is not a ghost, and goes on to let them off the hook for his Passion and death. He assures them that everything that happened to him was part of God's saving plan for them. And then, joy of joys, he starts to speak of forgiveness:

“Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”

The disciples must have thought that that forgiveness had indeed begun in Jerusalem, and that they had been witnesses, because the forgiveness, the Divine Mercy, had begun with them. Here we find the source of the Divine Mercy that buoys up Peter in our First Reading, and that has continued to flow, into your life, and mine.