

It's a great grace and honor for me to pray with you today on this great feast day. And while I was praying with Jesus' Sacred Heart, I recalled some memories of my friend Matt, who was born with a disease called muscular atrophy type II, which is a strain of muscular dystrophy. He weighs about 70 pounds and is wheelchair bound. I would sleepover a couple times a week, waking up every few hours to turn him so he did not get bedsores.

Muscular Dystrophy is a muscle disease that progressively weakens and deteriorates the muscles. One of the strongest muscles in the body is the heart; hence the main cause of death is heart failure. After my encounter with Matt, I was motivated to work in a cardiology research lab that summer, hoping to contribute in finding a solution to lengthen the lifespan for my friend's disease. Unfortunately, the remedy we discovered was merely a temporary Band-Aid effect and an early death will still be inevitable. There is no cure for muscular dystrophy.

On a spiritual level, the disease of sin slowly deteriorates the muscles of our hearts and souls. However, our Good God has provided an eternal cure – the sacrament of reconciliation! It is through confession of our sins to a priest that we are healed and made whole. Our hearts, damaged and scourged by sin, are not merely repaired or fixed, but replaced by a heart transplant! When we receive the Father's mercy, pardon and peace, Our Father, replaces our stony hearts with a new heart, His Son Jesus' Heart!

Today all the divine floodgates through which graces flow are opened! Jesus told St. Faustina that today's extraordinary grace is that "the soul which will go to confession and receive Holy Communion on Divine Mercy Sunday will obtain *complete* forgiveness of sins and punishment." This most special grace promised by our Lord for Mercy Sunday is nothing less than the equivalent of a complete renewal of baptismal grace in the soul: "*total* forgiveness of sins and punishment." This measure of grace can only be received otherwise through baptism itself, when the person is made a new creation, or through making a sacramental confession as an act of *perfect* contrition for sin, out of *pure* love for God.

Now, Baptism cannot be repeated and "perfect" sorrow and contrition for our sin is almost impossible. Therefore, the special graces promised by our Lord for Mercy Sunday can be received by a soul in a state of grace, but with *imperfect* love for God, and *imperfect* contrition for sin—as long as the soul merely trusts in the Mercy of God, and clings to Him because of His promised benefits. This is the miracle of Divine Mercy Sunday – no matter how broken or weak our love for God is or how sorrowful we are for our sinfulness, we can still receive *complete* forgiveness of all our sin and its consequences! We are made a new creation again, like a second baptism! The ripple effect of punishment for our sin is washed away. Our time in purgatory is most likely shortened.

But we wonder if Jesus has conquered our sin and death, why do Jesus' wounds from the cross still remain in his resurrected body? His wounds provide evidence of his resurrection to the apostles and to us. The soldier's arrow of sin wounds and crucifies Jesus. This scourge opens the door to Jesus' heart from his side, which brings the balm of forgiveness to heal the sin and division in our hearts!

St Martin of Tours once encountered Satan, who tried to convince the bishop that he was really Christ. Martin replied, "If you are Christ then where are your wounds?" When Satan responded that he wanted to show Martin his glory, not his suffering, Martin answered, "You are the devil; a Savior who is without wounds, who does not have the mark of his sufferings, I do not acknowledge." Because it is through the wounds of Christ suffered in love, that we are healed.

Besides the objective actions of receiving reconciliation and Holy Communion today, **what** is our duty to cooperate with this extraordinary grace of Divine Mercy Sunday? We are to open wide our hearts and like Thomas, place our hand in Jesus' side, and receive his heart wounded by love. Jesus' Sacred Heart is the place of healing and salvation! It is only through His wounds that we are healed.

We are called to imitate Christ. Therefore, to most closely image Jesus, I must show Jesus my wounds and allow them to be healed. It is a very scary and vulnerable place to be to let Jesus see my fears and failures with my work, or touch my feelings of rejection and betrayal of a friend, or hear my misery and disappointment with loved ones who drift away from the faith. We may be unsure of what Jesus' response will be when we put our heart out there. Will he tread lightly? Will he show compassion and suffer with me? Will the sharpness and sting of this pain and suffering in my heart be amplified if I expose it to his light? It's much easier to avoid or distract ourselves from the reality of our sin and weakness. The confessional must not be a torture chamber but an encounter with the Lord's mercy which spurs us on to do our best. We seek his mercy not because we hurt God but that we love him and don't want to hurt him.

We can gauge our union with Jesus and growth in prayer by our everyday, ordinary Gospel living. If we have not yet accepted to the bottom of our hearts the love and forgiveness of Jesus, we still have the tendency to declare ourselves innocent and to blame others; or else the temptation to discouragement or even to despair when we see our faults and sins in the harsh light of day. Are we patient with our spouse and children? Do we over indulge our cravings for food, entertainment, or leisure? Are we quick to judge the random person we pass by at the grocery store or sports game? Do we hide our weaknesses from our close friends out of fear or shame?

The most difficult thing for any human person is to believe they are truly loved by Our Heavenly Father and to receive His love through our trusted neighbors, friends, or family. It is risk-free to live with a façade that masks our deeper desires or struggles. But it is also burdensome and stressful to carry this perfectionism constantly. On the other hand, it is a great challenge to live transparently with our neighbor, exposing our imperfections and being deeply known in our insecurities. Yet this openness seems to bring fruitful freedom and joy. We are most human when we invite Jesus to enter into the mystery of our wounds and weaknesses freely. Jesus wants to go into the dysfunction, the tension, and the lack of forgiveness and bring God's love through the instrument of our neighbors.

So where do we turn to find this certainty of pardon and peace within our heart's darkest and broken places? We run to Jesus! **We run to know Jesus** in the priest when we seek

reconciliation with God Our Father as we confess our sins! The confessor is the doctor of the soul. Let him enter your wounds! It is only through our wounds that Jesus can enter as the divine physician. The patience and kindness of the confessor opens the way to the innermost secrets of the soul. Jesus is waiting for you there, hidden by the priest. Here the misery of the soul meets the God of mercy. Souls draw graces solely with the vessel of trust. If their trust is great, there is no limit to His generosity. He washes us clean of our past and is the remedy to our sin from our entire life!

Usually the mercy of God will be poured upon us in proportion to our confidence in His goodness. There is only one limit to God's mercy: believing that it is limited. Unnamed, unspoken guilt is a torment and a burden. However, today Jesus comes to us, opening the floodgates into our imperfect and divided hearts. He gives us a disproportionate amount of grace through the sacrament of Confession and receiving Him in the Eucharist. He takes away our stony hearts and places within us new hearts, His Sacred Heart! We are freed from our fears, doubts, anxieties, and darkness.

We run to love Jesus when we worship Him in the Eucharist, begging for His fountain of love and mercy to pour into our sadness and sorrow. Jesus has established a throne of mercy on earth – the tabernacle – and from this throne He desires to enter into your heart. You can come to Him at any moment at any time; He wants to speak to you. His mercy is greater than your sins and those of the entire world. Your misery has disappeared in the depths of His Mercy. Your sin has melted in the furnace of God's love. Allow him to conquer our stony hearts.

This knowledge and love of Jesus impels us to run to SERVE Jesus in the poorest of the poor when we see him in distressing disguise: hungry for love, thirsty for peace, wanting to be clothed with dignity and worth, seeking shelter in an understanding heart, and hoping for healing by a warm smile. My friend Matt often prays when he is suffering, "O Jesus, Make my heart like yours. Be with me in this pain and suffering because I no longer feel my cross when I think of yours!" Our hearts are deteriorating from sin and division but today we run to Jesus seeking the remedy, the extraordinary grace of Divine Mercy that will completely forgive our sins! Jesus shall give us a new Heart, His Heart!

May we have the courage and confidence to not hide from our suffering and wounds because the resurrection has come and His light will shine through our wounds and make them glorious. Never tire of seeking His mercy. The confessional must not be a torture chamber but an encounter with the Lord's mercy which spurs us on to do our best. We seek his mercy not because we hurt God but that we love him and don't want to hurt him. *Pray with great confidence, with confidence based upon the goodness and infinite generosity of God and upon the promises of Jesus Christ. God is a spring of living water which flows unceasingly into the hearts of those who pray.*

We must entrust the past to the mercy of God, the present to His love found in the Eucharist, and the future to His providence through the sacrament of confession's fortification.

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