

Reconciliation of the World to the Father

(First presented by Willy Effinger on February 20th, 2016)

Only eight weeks ago, we celebrated Christmas. Only four weeks ago, we celebrated the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, which incidentally is also my birthday. Only ten days ago, we entered into the Lenten season – a time to reflect, to go inward, to find our hidden faults, a time to meditate and to get closer to God. Let us take a big jump back in time for the purposes of understanding all of this and how we can be part of the reconciliation of the world to the Father. Let us imagine ourselves together with the Apostles in the Upper Room. It is the end of the day, the first day of the week; lots of things have just happened. There was the discovery of the empty tomb by one of the faithful followers of Jesus; she was completely beside herself until Jesus called her by name: “Mary” and she recognized her Beloved “Raboni”. Peter and John ran to check out Mary Magdalene's claim; lo and behold, the tomb was empty. Those guys were not quite as lucky to see Jesus; they had to wait.

For fear of the Jews, the disciples were huddled together in the Upper Room like chick's under the hen's plumage; with great expectation, they waited – but they were a little bit like lost sheep without their shepherd. Someone had the idea to bolt the door shut so they would not tremble in fear. This, of course, would not have kept out a cohort of Roman soldiers or Jewish troublemakers but it was enough to calm their emotions somewhat. By the power of the Holy Spirit, their beloved Jesus was manifested before them. This scene is most important in forming this little community and should be just as important to you and me and all modern-day Christians. At this very moment, the gift of the Holy Spirit was communicated to them and subsequently to us. This is so crucial to the development of faith, life and trust for each individual and their entire community. A new understanding, a new awareness of faith takes place; they realize the power of their beloved Jesus. No

hostility will ever touch Him again. He has gone to hell and back, so to speak, and is empowered. This very power He bestows on His Apostles and those present with them. ***“Peace be with you”***. Just to make sure they understood, Jesus said again: ***“Peace be with you. As the Father sent Me, so I am sending you.”*** After He had said this, He breathed on them, saying: ***“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained.”*** (John 20: 19-23) Jesus made the connection between the Old Testament and the present time. The greeting of peace in the Old Testament was reserved for the most solemn moments and is known as the “eschatological gift of peace”, that is, the final, all-encompassing peace at the end of time. Jesus had already foretold this moment to them when He said: ***“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard Me say to you, ‘I will go away and I will come to you.’ If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe.”*** (John 14:27-29)

The One standing among them, living and well, showed them His wounds; He showed them the deep connection between the Crucifixion, a sign of God's love for the world, and His Resurrection, His triumph over death and fear. Unique mysteries were taking place in that Upper Room. Just as the Father had bestowed with authority all the powers of Heaven upon His Son, so the Son with the same authority bestowed His own mission upon them, upon His Church and upon you and me. The

Risen One breathed on the Apostles just as the Father had blown the breath of life into man, as we read in the Book of Genesis. Are you still imagining yourself in the Upper Room with Jesus? It is good to be there! We too want to be filled with new life. The old Adam is cold and dead from sin. The lava (“*Adama*”) which was once hot has cooled down and needs to be rekindled by the breath of the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins through reconciliation. Oh yes, it is good to be there! Breathe on me, Lord God! Breathe on me, Holy Spirit! I want to be consecrated in truth! In John 17:17-19, we read these words of Jesus: “... ***consecrate them in the truth; Your Word, Father, is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world and for their sake I consecrate Myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth.***” You see, my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, it is truly good to be there, to bathe in the true presence and His Word. A little further in that passage, Jesus tells us that He prays always for those who, through the teaching of the Apostles, will come to believe in Him. He wants us all to be one – that is you and me! Let us truly become one with each other in Him.

The transfigured Jesus offers to all of us the Paschal gifts, the precious fruit of His death and resurrection. He offers us the gifts of peace and joy, the forgiveness of sins and, most importantly, He gives us the Spirit. This Spirit comes forth to us through the breath and the Word of Jesus and brings us new life. This is the new life which is reborn from the forgiving of sins! As we heard earlier, the power to forgive sins was bestowed upon the Apostles; after them, onto the Bishops and through them, onto the priests. Sin is always present in our lives – but so is forgiveness! God's mercy is fathomless – especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In Diary entry 1448, Saint Faustina recorded these words of Jesus: “... ***it suffices to come with faith to the feet of My representative and to reveal to him one's misery and the miracle of Divine Mercy will be fully demonstrated. Were a soul like a decaying corpse so that from a human standpoint, there would be no hope of restoration and everything would already be lost, it is not so with God. The miracle of Divine Mercy restores that soul in full. Oh, how miserable are those who do not take advantage the miracle of God's mercy! You will call out in vain, but it will be too late.***”

In His general audience on February 19, 2014 Pope Francis said: “Forgiveness is not the fruit of our own efforts but rather a gift; it is a gift of the Holy Spirit who fills us with the wellspring of mercy and of grace that flows unceasingly from the open Heart of the crucified and risen Christ ... we can truly be at peace only if we allow ourselves to be reconciled in the Lord Jesus, with the Father and with the brethren.” My dear friends, both the sinner and the Church have duties to fulfill: the penitent must discern errors and examine his/her conscience, while the Church must welcome the repentant sinner and restore him/her to the salvific Heart of the Father.

In His general audience on November 20 in 2013 Pope Francis included the following message: “The Church is the depository of the power of the keys, of opening or closing to forgiveness. God forgives every man in His sovereign mercy, but He Himself willed that those who belong to Christ and to the Church receive forgiveness by means of the ministers of the community. Through the apostolic ministry the mercy of God reaches me, my faults are forgiven and joy is bestowed on me. In this way Jesus calls us to live out reconciliation in the ecclesial, the community, dimension as well. And this is very beautiful. The Church, who is holy and at the same time in need of penitence, accompanies us on the journey of conversion throughout our life. The Church is not a mistress of the power of the keys, but a servant of the ministry of mercy and rejoices every time she can offer this divine gift.” It is the Church which gives us access to all the Sacraments; but the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Penance and the Eucharist) have a particularly intimate connection. Each in its own way and at the same time collectively working together, they bring the repentant believers closer to the Kingdom of God.

Pope Francis' general audience on the 13th of November in 2013 included these words: “In the

Sacrament of Baptism all sins are remitted, original sin and all of our personal sins, as well as the suffering of sin. With Baptism the door to an effectively new life is opened, one which is not burdened by the weight of a negative past, but rather already feels the beauty and the goodness of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the powerful intervention of God's mercy in our lives, to save us. This saving intervention does not take away our human nature and its weakness – we are all weak and we are all sinners – and it does not take from us our responsibility to ask for forgiveness every time we err! I cannot be baptized many times, but I can go to confession and by doing so renew the grace of Baptism. It is as though I were being baptized for a second time. The Lord Jesus is very very good and never tires of forgiving us. Even then the door that Baptism opens to us in order to enter the Church is a little closed, due to our weaknesses and our sins. Confession reopens it, precisely because it is a second Baptism that forgives us of everything and illuminates us to go forward with the light of the Lord. Let us go forward in this way, joyfully, because life should be lived with the joy of Jesus Christ; and this is a grace of the Lord.”

God wants us to be free of any sin and burden; He wants to put a new cloak around and over us. He truly wants us to experience and partake in a second Baptism. That is the very reason He gave to the Church – and therefore to us – Divine Mercy Sunday. In this Feast, we can and will experience the most awesome gift God is willing to give: NEW LIFE. We can turn with total trust to Him who loves us and receive His peace and mercy. Jesus told Saint Faustina to record the following words which can be found in Diary entry 699:

“My daughter, tell the whole world about My inconceivable mercy. I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of My tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fount of My mercy. The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment. On that day all the divine floodgates through which grace flow are opened. Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet. My mercy is so great that no mind, be it of man or of Angel, will be able to fathom it throughout all eternity ... The Feast of Mercy emerged from My very depths of tenderness. It is My desire that it be solemnly celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter. Mankind will not have peace until it turns to the Fount of My Mercy.”

So, my brothers and sisters, there you have it! Is your head slightly spinning at this point? Are you still in the Upper Room? Did you realize that you have moved from the UR to the RR, namely the Reconciliation Room? So here we are now in the RR filled with secrets! Speaking of secrets, I am reminded of something I overheard last fall when I was in Gravenhurst for a Parish Mission. Early in the morning, just before sunrise, I went walking along the wharf on the wooden walkways just over the water. At the edge, just a little ahead of me, I saw a father and son fishing. “Son, do you want me to tell you about the two most important secrets about women?” the father asked. There was a moment of silence before the son replied: “Sure, dad”. The father said: “Oh, never mind.” When the son insisted that his father tell him, the wise dad said: “#1: I don't know and #2: Nobody knows!”

That's the way it is with the RR too – we don't have the faintest idea what goes on in there. Oh sure, we know that we go in more or less well-prepared, confess our sins, say an act of contrition and hopefully receive absolution so that we can be homeward bound again. But what really happens spiritually, mentally, Church-wise and globally? I certainly don't know and would dare to say that nobody on earth really knows! The best way to describe the experience is to say that it appears to be a mystery!

Today, more than ever before, we know about God's liberating action. He loves us and wants us to experience His Mercy so that we can be set free. Let's look at what we do know about this

RR:

Fact one: we are wounded

Fact two: we have probably wounded someone else

Fact three: we have wounded the Body of Christ, the Church

Fact four: we have weakened society whose strong link we are called to be

Fact five: we injured creation and every living being globally

Fact six which really should be fact #1 – we have hurt Christ who gave Himself for us.

We have one thing working in our favour: God the Father is infinitely merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love. Jesus is Mercy Incarnate; His very being is mercy. If I may say so, His very DNA is mercy. From the beginning of time, from the creation of the world to this very day, He is always eagerly waiting, watching, tapping His fingers and hoping that we will approach Him. Then, He runs with arms outstretched to embrace us, to put a fine robe around us and to call us His own. Mercy begets mercy, love begets love. Soul by soul, piece by piece, the world can be liberated and we can count ourselves among those of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people. You too can declare the merciful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light. In 1 Peter 2: 9,10 we read: "Once you were no people but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy in abundance." Let us face it: we are filled with truth, light life, peace, joy, love and mercy. We are wrapped in the Father's mantle of mercy, filled with the Paschal mystery of Christ and supported by the strength of the Holy Spirit. So, let us open the door of the RR and fly again into the arms of our loving Father!