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Meditations: Sunday of the Second Week of Easter (Year B)

Some reflections that can guide our prayer on this Second Sunday of Easter, which is also called Divine Mercy Sunday. The topics are: Thomas wants to touch Jesus' wounds; God's mercy enkindles our faith; the wounds of the Risen Christ are a proof of his love.

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- Thomas wants to touch Jesus' wounds
- God's mercy enkindles our faith
- The wounds of the Risen Christ are a proof of his love

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THE GOSPEL for today's Mass, after narrating the first appearance of our Lord to the disciples, focuses on the figure of the apostle Thomas, who was not present on that occasion. When the others, overflowing with joy, tell him they have seen the Lord, Thomas refuses to believe them. Neither the insistence of the other ten disciples, nor the testimony of the holy women, nor the story of what had happened to the disciples on the way to Emmaus, can convince him to

change his mind. He continues to reaffirm his unbelief: *Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe (Jn 20:25).*

We can imagine the struggle going on inside Thomas's heart. He was a strong-minded and generous person, who truly loved our Lord. For instance, when Jesus decided to go to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead, despite the danger of being taken prisoner and condemned to death, Thomas exhorts the other apostles: *Let us also go, that we may die with him (Jn 11:16).* And at the Last Supper, when Jesus is telling his disciples what heaven will be like for them if they follow in his footsteps, Thomas says with great simplicity that he doesn't understand: *Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way? (Jn 14:5).*

Thomas was happy when close to Jesus. He truly wanted to follow Him and declared that he was ready to share his fate. Nevertheless, he had failed to grasp fully all that our Lord's mission entailed. When Jesus died, Thomas underwent a deep personal crisis. But his sincere desire to follow Jesus enabled him to open his heart to the light of faith. "Despite his lack of faith, we should be grateful to Thomas, because he was not content to hear from others that Jesus was alive, or merely to see him in the flesh. He wanted to see 'more deeply,' to touch with his hand the Lord's wounds, the signs of his love ... We need to see Jesus by 'touching his love.' Only thus can we reach the heart of the faith and, like the disciples, find a peace and joy that goes beyond all doubt (cf. *Jn* 20:19-20)."^[1] —

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EIGHT DAYS AFTER his first appearance, Jesus returns to be with the disciples. On this occasion, Thomas is present. *Jesus stood among them, and said: Peace be with you. Then he said to Thomas, Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing (Jn 20:27).* Thomas is overcome with amazement, and his heart overflows with joy. He “reacts with the most splendid profession of faith in the whole of the New Testament”^[2]: *My Lord and my God! (Jn 20:28).* On this Sunday of Divine Mercy, we contemplate God’s great mercy shown to Thomas and, in him, to each one of us. Jesus comes to comfort – and how marvelously! – that disciple who, by not believing, was suffering so much.

Thomas feels understood. Jesus’ appearance is like a hug that frees him from the fear and insecurity that

had led him to take refuge in unbelief. Deep in his heart an ember of hope had always been present, even if he hadn't tried to enkindle it out of fear of being deceived.

Suddenly he realizes how worthy Jesus is of his faith – recalling his miracles, his teachings, his unbelievable love and compassion. Thomas remembers his life at Jesus' side, and is astounded at how little he has really understood.

After expressing his faith and adoration in such a brief and beautiful way: “My Lord and my God,” Thomas accepts Jesus' affectionate reproach: *Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe (Jn 20:29)*. Now he is eager to dedicate the rest of his life – and even to die a martyr – to spread the faith that has overcome all his doubts. Although other disconcerting moments may arise, Thomas has

learned to entrust himself to God and to ground his life on the shadow-filled light of faith.

“THY WOUNDS, as Thomas saw, I do not see; Yet Thee confess my Lord and God to be.”^[3] We are asked to believe without having seen, without having lived alongside Jesus on this earth and being direct witnesses of his resurrection. Nevertheless, our faith is the same as that professed by Thomas and the other apostles; and, like them, we are called to evangelise the whole world. In order to achieve this, we rely on the closeness and mercy of our Lord. Christ himself, who appeared before the unbelieving apostle and showed him his wounds, gives himself to us. “He begs us to give him a little love, as he silently shows us his wounds.”^[4]

Jesus has wanted to open up the sources of his life so that we may share in it. Our Lord's wounds were, for Thomas and the other apostles, a sign of his love. On seeing those wounds, they were not filled with sorrow, which would have been understandable, but rather they were flooded with peace. Those marks of Christ – which He wished to retain – are the seal of his mercy. Contemplating them permits us to bypass, in advance, any doubts that could assail us when we reflect on our own poor response. Those wounds are the proof that Jesus' love is steadfast and always available for us.

“The wounds of Jesus are a scandal, a stumbling-block for faith, yet they are also the proof for faith. That is why the body of the Risen Christ always retains the wounds, as the enduring sign of God's love for us. They are essential for believing in

God – not for believing that God exists, but for believing that God is love, mercy and faithfulness. Saint Peter, quoting Isaiah, writes to Christians: ‘by his wounds you have been healed’ (1 Pet 2:24, cf. Is: 53:5).”^[5] Let us ask our Lady, “the perfect icon of faith,”^[6] to intercede for us help us to touch the wounds of Jesus as Thomas did.

^[1] Francis, Homily, 8 April 2018.

^[2] Benedict XVI, General Audience, 27 September 2006.

^[3] Eucharistic Hymn *Adoro Te devote*.

^[4] Saint Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 179.

^[5] Francis, Homily 27 April 2014.

^[6] Francis, *Lumen fidei*, no. 58.

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