

2nd Sunday of Easter, A (Divine Mercy) – April 12, 2026 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham – 5:00 Saturday; 8:30, 11:00am Sunday Masses – 625 words

Our experience of God's mercy can at times seem transactional, perhaps. Maybe the priest doesn't give helpful advice or any advice at all in confession; or, one has a sense of frustration centered around the fact of often having to go to confession for the same or similar things. On one level, the transactional feeling of it is helpful: we need to be able to point to a place and a time where we were forgiven, rather than having a vague and undefined sense of it. So the sacraments provide that for us. But we are also challenged to see the deeply personal side of divine mercy, too – sometimes obscured by the humanity of the priest or the repetition of experience or some other factor.

In the gospel, Christ provides this deeply personal framework: he breathes the gift of the Holy Spirit on the disciples. Where else do we see God breathing in the bible? Well, back in the book of Genesis, at the dawn of time, the Creation of the Universe, where he breathed life into Adam. Or in the book of Ezekiel, where he breathed life into the valley of dry bones – a foreshadowing of the resurrection. Jesus did not have to breathe on his apostles in order to give them the gift of the Holy Spirit, but he did – and he did so advisedly, to teach us the deeper meaning of what was happening. With the forgiveness of sins comes a re-creation, a new creation. God's mercy makes us alive.

The psalm chosen for this Sunday further strengthens our understanding of this mercy. It repeats the refrain, "his mercy endures forever"; some translations have it as "his love endures forever". And the truth is, both are accurate: the Hebrew word used implies several concepts that in English are hard to button-up in a single word: mercy, love, sacrifice, fidelity, covenant. But what this means is that God does not show mercy to us capriciously – as if it were because he was having a good day and feeling generous; much less is his mercy random and not available to all. No, God offers mercy to all, in fulfillment of a promise; in fulfillment of his covenant with the human race in Jesus Christ.

Behind the transactional feeling that confession may sometimes have, then, is something deeply personal and the fulfillment of a divine promise. Yes, one may well "go in the box, say the sins, hear the advice, get the forgiveness" – and sin certainly adds to the tedium of life. But each time we undertake that action with the right dispositions, God himself breathes life into us – a share in his own life, which is what really matters in the end. Without his divine life in our souls, which we call "grace", we are the living dead. Being alive in him means being a part of his family and the beneficiary of his promises, the most important of which is eternal life along with all the angels and saints in heaven.

Listen again, then, to the first lines of the second reading. Saint Peter said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading...". God's mercy is great, and the "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" inheritance he has prepared for those who are alive in him is available to all without exception. There is nothing he will not forgive! Even if we must go to confession many times throughout our lives, may we see and experience the deep meaning behind this great gift that our Risen Lord left for us.