



# The Holy See

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## PAPAL MASS FOR THE POSSESSION OF THE CHAIR OF THE BISHOP OF ROME

### **HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS**

*Basilica of Saint John Lateran*

*Second Sunday of Easter - Divine Mercy Sunday, 7 April 2013*

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It is with joy that I am celebrating the Eucharist for the first time in this Lateran Basilica, the Cathedral of the Bishop of Rome. I greet all of you with great affection: my very dear Cardinal Vicar, the auxiliary bishops, the diocesan presbyterate, the deacons, the men and women religious, and all the lay faithful. I also greet the Mayor, his wife and all the authorities present. Together let us walk in the light of the risen Lord.

1. Today we are celebrating the Second Sunday of Easter, also known as "Divine Mercy Sunday". What a beautiful truth of faith this is for our lives: the mercy of God! God's love for us is so great, so deep; it is an unfailing love, one which always takes us by the hand and supports us, lifts us up and leads us on.

2. In today's Gospel, the Apostle Thomas personally experiences this mercy of God, which has a concrete face, the face of Jesus, the risen Jesus. Thomas does not believe it when the other Apostles tell him: "We have seen the Lord". It isn't enough for him that Jesus had foretold it, promised it: "On the third day I will rise". He wants to see, he wants to put his hand in the place of the nails and in Jesus' side. And how does Jesus react? With patience: Jesus does not abandon Thomas in his stubborn unbelief; he gives him a week's time, he does not close the door, he waits. And Thomas acknowledges his own poverty, his little faith. "My Lord and my God!": with this simple yet faith-filled invocation, he responds to Jesus' patience. He lets himself be enveloped by divine mercy; he sees it before his eyes, in the wounds of Christ's hands and feet and in his open side, and he discovers trust: he is a new man, no longer an unbeliever, but a believer.

Let us also remember Peter: three times he denied Jesus, precisely when he should have been closest to him; and when he hits bottom he meets the gaze of Jesus who patiently, wordlessly, says to him: "Peter, don't be afraid of your weakness, trust in me". Peter understands, he feels the loving gaze of Jesus, and he weeps. How beautiful is this gaze of Jesus – how much tenderness is there! Brothers and sisters, let us never lose trust in the patience and mercy of God!

Let us think too of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus: their sad faces, their barren journey, their despair. But Jesus does not abandon them: he walks beside them, and not only that! Patiently he explains the Scriptures which spoke of him, and he stays to share a meal with them. This is God's way of doing things: he is not impatient like us, who often want everything all at once, even in our dealings with other people. God is patient with us because he loves us, and those who love are able to understand, to hope, to inspire confidence; they do not give up, they do not burn bridges, they are able to forgive. Let us remember this in our lives as Christians: God always waits for us, even when we have left him behind! He is never far from us, and if we return to him, he is ready to embrace us.

I am always struck when I reread the parable of the merciful Father; it impresses me because it always gives me great hope. Think of that younger son who was in the Father's house, who was loved; and yet he wants his part of the inheritance; he goes off, spends everything, hits rock bottom, where he could not be more distant from the Father, yet when he is at his lowest, he misses the warmth of the Father's house and he goes back. And the Father? Had he forgotten the son? No, never. He is there, he sees the son from afar, he was waiting for him every hour of every day, the son was always in his father's heart, even though he had left him, even though he had squandered his whole inheritance, his freedom. The Father, with patience, love, hope and mercy, had never for a second stopped thinking about him, and as soon as he sees him still far off, he runs out to meet him and embraces him with tenderness, the tenderness of God, without a word of reproach: he has returned! And that is the joy of the Father. In that embrace for his son is all this joy: he has returned! God is always waiting for us, he never grows tired. Jesus shows us this merciful patience of God so that we can regain confidence, hope – always! A great German theologian, Romano Guardini, said that God responds to our weakness by his patience, and this is the reason for our confidence, our hope (cf. *Glaubenserkenntnis*, Würzburg, 1949, p. 28). It is like a dialogue between our weakness and the patience of God, it is a dialogue that, if we do it, will grant us hope.

3. I would like to emphasize one other thing: God's patience has to call forth in us the courage to return to him, however many mistakes and sins there may be in our life. Jesus tells Thomas to put his hand in the wounds of his hands and his feet, and in his side. We too can enter into the wounds of Jesus, we can actually touch him. This happens every time that we receive the sacraments with faith. Saint Bernard, in a fine homily, says: "Through the wounds of Jesus I can suck honey from the rock and oil from the flinty rock (cf. Deut 32:13), I can taste and see the goodness of the Lord" (On the Song of Songs, 61:4). It is there, in the wounds of Jesus, that we

are truly secure; there we encounter the boundless love of his heart. Thomas understood this. Saint Bernard goes on to ask: But what can I count on? My own merits? No, "My merit is God's mercy. I am by no means lacking merits as long as he is rich in mercy. If the mercies of the Lord are manifold, I too will abound in merits" (ibid., 5). This is important: the courage to trust in Jesus' mercy, to trust in his patience, to seek refuge always in the wounds of his love. Saint Bernard even states: "So what if my conscience gnaws at me for my many sins? 'Where sin has abounded, there grace has abounded all the more' (Rom 5:20)" (ibid.). Maybe someone among us here is thinking: my sin is so great, I am as far from God as the younger son in the parable, my unbelief is like that of Thomas; I don't have the courage to go back, to believe that God can welcome me and that he is waiting for me, of all people. But God is indeed waiting for you; he asks of you only the courage to go to him. How many times in my pastoral ministry have I heard it said: "Father, I have many sins"; and I have always pleaded: "Don't be afraid, go to him, he is waiting for you, he will take care of everything". We hear many offers from the world around us; but let us take up God's offer instead: his is a caress of love. For God, we are not numbers, we are important, indeed we are the most important thing to him; even if we are sinners, we are what is closest to his heart.

Adam, after his sin, experiences shame, he feels naked, he senses the weight of what he has done; and yet God does not abandon him: if that moment of sin marks the beginning of his exile from God, there is already a promise of return, a possibility of return. God immediately asks: "Adam, where are you?" He seeks him out. Jesus took on our nakedness, he took upon himself the shame of Adam, the nakedness of his sin, in order to wash away our sin: by his wounds we have been healed. Remember what Saint Paul says: "What shall I boast of, if not my weakness, my poverty? Precisely in feeling my sinfulness, in looking at my sins, I can see and encounter God's mercy, his love, and go to him to receive forgiveness.

In my own life, I have so often seen God's merciful countenance, his patience; I have also seen so many people find the courage to enter the wounds of Jesus by saying to him: Lord, I am here, accept my poverty, hide my sin in your wounds, wash it away with your blood. And I have always seen that God did just this – he accepted them, consoled them, cleansed them, loved them.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us be enveloped by the mercy of God; let us trust in his patience, which always gives us more time. Let us find the courage to return to his house, to dwell in his loving wounds, allowing ourselves be loved by him and to encounter his mercy in the sacraments. We will feel his wonderful tenderness, we will feel his embrace, and we too will become more capable of mercy, patience, forgiveness and love.

## OF THE LATERAN BASILICA

*Brothers and Sisters, Good Evening!*

Thank you very much for your company in the Mass today. Thank you very much! I ask that you pray for me, I need it. Never forget this. Thank you everyone!

And let us go forward all together, the people and the Bishop, all together; forward always with the joy of the Resurrection of Jesus; He is always at our side.

May the Lord bless you!

After he blessed the crowd, he said:

Thank you so much! See you soon!