

Vision II Week Two

On this Divine Mercy Sunday we celebrate God's great mercy that is always available to us.

In our gospel today, we read what Jesus said to his disciples after his resurrection. What he didn't say is almost as important. He didn't say:

- Where were you when I needed you?
- How could you run away after all we said and did together?
- Why should I even bother with you?
- It's going to take a long time for me to trust you again!

Rather, he said, "Peace be with you". He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

His forgiveness and mercy to his disciples was complete and unconditional.

God's love and mercy extend beyond the boundaries of our imagination. That's what Divine Mercy is all about. Because of our brokenness, the mercy of God is going to continually be a part of our lives.

Our gospel today also recounts the institution of the sacrament of confession or reconciliation. This sacrament can be our path to peace and healing. I personally have had much healing for my wounded soul through this sacrament of God's mercy and I urge all of you to celebrate this sacrament as often as you can.

We come to God with our failures and he tells us, "I forgive you, I love you". Because of this great mercy He heals us like no other. We have to remember to be merciful as well.

Have we burdened someone with our lack of forgiveness? Have we marginalized someone instead of being merciful?

Who is it that we can bring healing to by practicing mercy and forgiveness. Who is it that we need to "breathe upon" and give the gift of mercy?

Last week, on Easter Sunday, we started our new series called Vision. We stated that **vision is a picture of what could be and should be but does not exist...yet.** It's a picture of a better future, a brighter tomorrow, a new dawn, if you will. And so today, let's look at God's vision for us.

He has a vision for each and every one of us. This vision is what we could and should be, even if we don't measure up to this vision right now.

Over the next few weeks, we're also going to take a fresh look at the vision God has given us for our parish.

We are taking this new look at our vision on the anniversary of our first vision campaign.

One year ago, we invited you to step forward and make a commitment to share in the Vision of Good Shepherd Parish by sharing your gifts of time and talent; and you responded in a most generous way.

We introduced that vision in this way: *That we wanted to be a church of “growing disciples, who are growing disciples”.*

Now this new vision campaign is not about our new building. Even though our building symbolizes and supports our vision for the kind of church we want to be, this campaign is so much more than bricks and mortar.

We want to be a church that puts out into the deep; a church that evangelizes beyond these walls to those who need to hear the good news that we proclaim.

Last year, we asked each of you to consider sharing your gifts and your time. We asked you to look at where you felt comfortable sharing and then asked you to look further, to step out of your comfort zones to the next level of commitment.

We called that commitment of giving a **“faith gift”**, which is really a *faith-expanding* gift. This faith gift is all about trusting in the Lord to lead us where he wants us to be, in service to others.

Our gospel today tells us that Jesus called his disciples to blanket the world with mercy and forgiveness.

Mercy is how God reaches us; mercy is how we reach others. We know that we are called to serve others, the poor, the homeless, those who struggle with addiction; those who populate our prisons, those who need to know God. We know that we are called to serve and not to judge.

We are called to practice mercy. Mercy is at the heart of everything we do for others. Mercy is at the heart of everything that God does for us.

God has blessed our parish with growth since our move to this new worship space. There are some key strategies we have adopted that have fueled that growth.

This parish has changed the conversation in Catholic circles. We are the church with “greeters at the doors”; we are the parish that welcomes people in a way that many have never experienced before.

We are the parish that offers an environment of worship that supports those who come through our front doors each Sunday by the programs that we offer here. This parish is setting the pace for other Catholic parishes in our diocese.

Many people work hard to create what we'd like to call, an ***irresistible environment*** on Sundays. This is so that people who don't know God or have given up on church or who don't even like church; will like being a part of our community of Good Shepherd.

We want to be that kind of church community because we think that's a healthy church and we are a healthy church, filled with people who are working together to reach even more people who are not connected to God.

Our core strategy for growing is to ***"invest and invite."*** Invest in relationships with friends, family members, co-workers and neighbours who don't have a church family and then, when appropriate, invite them to church.

We can create the greatest environment ever on Sundays but we have to get people here first. Invest and invite, invest and invite.

Our vision is to connect people in our community with the powerful message that there is a better, more meaningful way to live than what society is offering them.

Just as the first Christians were unified with a common vision and a common purpose, so we need to be unified in our vision and our purpose.

Just as they were generous with their gifts, so we need to continue to be generous with our gifts of time and talent.

That's what we envision for our parish. God will bless us as he did the early Christians for our generosity to others through our humble service.

In my ministry as a deacon, the Lord has blessed me far beyond anything I've done. Funny how that works! And I'm sure you can relate to this in your own lives as well. There's a reason why it feels good to serve God and others.

Since our first Vision campaign last year, our understanding of our needs has grown as well. There are many ministries within our parish that need your *time and talents*.

And so we continue to invite each of you to serve others through parish ministries that serves both within and outside these walls.

Over the next few weeks we are going to be taking a new look at our vision as a church. Then on the weekend of April 28th & 29th we're going to have a re-commitment to the campaign with new commitment cards to fill out.

For some of you, you are going to get through the series and you're going to say the commitment you made last year is all you can do at this time. And that's fine, please know we are grateful for your sacrifice.

For others, you are going to go through this series and think, "***I can commit more.***" You're most likely in a different place spiritually than you were last year and this may reflect in your desire to do more. Or, you may just have more time to give. So the action for you at the end of this series will be to increase your commitment.

For a third group, you may not have been here last year. You may be new to the parish. Or maybe you weren't in the right place last year to make a commitment to share your gifts. We want to invite you to consider making a commitment to the campaign and join us.

We are called to serve others; to bring people to Christ; to care for each other through mercy and love.

We want you to share in the joy that serving others brings. We want you to know the thrill of being a part of this vision.

You may have heard me say the word mercy a lot today. In fact, I've said it 20 times in the last ten minutes and that's not accidental.

On this Divine Mercy Sunday, let us expand the vision of this parish and make a commitment to all of us becoming disciples who are growing disciples, in mercy, love and service to others.