

## OCTAVE OF EASTER, 2026

Long before this Sunday was called “Divine Mercy Sunday”, it was called “The Octave of Easter.” As this Sunday’s Gospel reading from St. John’s Gospel (John 20:19-31) indicates, it was on the eighth day of the Resurrection that the Apostle Thomas, absent on Easter Sunday, received the Lord Jesus’ invitation to probe His wounds with his fingers, and believe in the stunning Good News of the Victory of Life over death, of Love over sin. On that day we received the Lord’s promise, “Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.” Together with St. Thomas, may we always respond “My Lord, and my God!”

Long before this Sunday was called “Divine Mercy Sunday”, it was called “White Sunday,” because those baptized at Easter would come to Mass wearing their white baptismal robes. In the Office of Readings, we have part of a sermon that the great St. Augustine of Hippo preached on this Sunday more than 1600 years ago. In his sermon he addressed the newly baptized as the Church’s new offspring and, a bit startlingly to our modern ears, “a new colony of bees.” We have a saying in English, “busy as a bee.” We are saved not through our merits but through the saving merits of Jesus Christ, shared with us through Faith, Baptism, and the Holy Eucharist. Once saved, however, we have some work to do, and we should be busy doing it. There are days of rest and holiness, the Lord’s Day every week and the full feast days throughout the year, but ordinarily we have work to do, the work of making justice and mercy real in the world.

Justice is treating people as they deserve, and Mercy is treating people as they need. We mortals cannot help seeing those two things as opposites, but not so with God. In God, Justice and Mercy are both expressions of His love for all. Because He loves the kid who broke that other kid’s nose with a sucker punch, He is willing to forgive. Because He loves the kid whose nose was broken, He demands that the nose breaker express contrition and make restitution. The Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory, implicit in Sacred Scripture and explicit in Sacred Tradition, is all about this simple truth of God’s love for both sides of the equation of human sin. Because He loves the sinner, the repentant sinner will enter into Eternal Life and perfect happiness. Because He loves the victim of sin, He demands that, before the repentant sinner is allowed to enter into into Eternal Life, he accept responsibility for his sins and make some kind of restitution, not to God, but to the victim, or, if that is impossible, to the human community harmed by sin. Quite simply, as expressions of Love, Justice and Mercy go together, and are worthless without each other. Merciless justice is not in fact Justice at all, but tyranny, and unjust mercy is not in fact Mercy at all, but anarchy.

As a teenager, reading “Romeo and Juliet,” I found every single character to be annoyingly stupid except the Prince of Verona. The Prince, at the end of the play, admits that he failed to crack down soon enough on the violence between the two absurdly proud houses of Montagu and Capulet, permitting the anarchy that killed several people in the play. “And I for winking at your discords too/ Have lost a brace of kinsmen; all are punish’d.” The law is never, under a false notion of mercy to wink at serious crime, as the Prince indicates earlier when he, quite properly, refrains from executing Romeo for killing vicious Tybalt, but exiles him. Rightly, the Prince observes, “Mercy but murders, pardoning those that kill.” The Prince refrains from the death penalty, but refuses to allow Romeo to get off scot free. That is true Mercy, and not

mere anarchy, expressing Love for all entangled in a web of violent crime by demanding genuine but restrained punishment.

In many countries of the world, mass immigration is a topic of intense and, at times, almost violent discussion. On this topic, our Bishop has written a teaching statement, and I will now read his letter introducing that statement. I will limit myself to observing that on this topic, as indeed on all topics, Justice and Mercy need to be held together as twin expressions of Love, so that we have authentic law and order, and neither tyranny on the one hand nor anarchy on the other.

#### READING OF THE BISHOP'S LETTER

As we strive to find ways to hold Mercy and Justice together on this issue, stumbling neither into tyranny nor anarchy, I cannot resist falling back on Shakespeare. My favorite of his plays in teenage years was "The Merchant of Venice", with its radiant character Portia. In the play's climactic scene, disguised as a Doctor of Laws, she attempts to explain to ruthless Shylock why Mercy must season Justice. He doesn't listen, of course; but on Divine Mercy Sunday it is appropriate for us to listen:

The quality of Mercy is not strained.  
It dropeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath; it is twice blest;  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:  
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes  
The throned monarch better than his crown;  
. . .  
But Mercy is above this sceptered sway;  
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,  
It is attribute to God himself;  
And earthly power doth then show likest God's  
When Mercy seasons Justice. Therefore, Jew,  
Though Justice be thy plea, consider this,  
That in the course of justice, none of us  
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;  
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render  
The deeds of Mercy . . .

May the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of Wisdom received in Holy Baptism, enable us, the Lord's own colony of bees, using St. Augustine's image, to pollinate the world around us with authentic Justice and Mercy.

Amen.