

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER, Year B
Acts 3:13-15,17-19; Ps 4:2,4,7-9; 1 Jn 2:1-5; Lk 24:35-48

ANOTHER MERCY SUNDAY

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun
Sunday, April 15, 2018, 8:30 and 10:30 a.m. Masses

In the **gospel** that we heard **last week**

Jesus appeared to his **disciples after he rose** from the **dead** (Jn 20:19-31),
and in the gospel that we just heard,

Jesus appeared to his **disciples after he rose** from the **dead** (Lk 24:35-48).

Last week was **Mercy Sunday**,
and **this week** is **another Mercy Sunday**.

Let's set **the stage** for the gospel that we just heard.

It was very **late Easter Sunday night**.

A number of **disciples** were **huddled together** in the **Upper Room**.

It would have been Peter and Andrew,
James and John, Philip and Matthew,
and our own patron saint, Bartholomew,
and a number of others (see Acts 1:13-14,23).

None of them had **seen** the **risen Lord Jesus**.

Two disciples had just **rejoined them**,

Cleopas (Lk 24:18),
and another disciple who goes nameless (Lk24:13),
who according to our Tradition is **Simon** or **Simeon**.

They **told** the **other disciples** what happened to them on the **road to Emmaus**
and how they **recognized Jesus** in the **breaking of the bread** (Lk 24:35).

Suddenly **Jesus appeared** to the whole group (Lk 24:36).

According to the **legend**,

the **risen Jesus appeared** to **Mary Magdalene** (see Mt 28:1,5-8),
and then **Mary Magdalene went to Peter** and said,

"Peter, I've got some **good news** and I've got some **bad news**."

So **Peter replied**, "OK, **good news first**."

Mary Magdalene said, "**Jesus is risen** from the dead. Alleluia!"

Peter responded, "That's **incredible, tremendous**."

In light of such good news, how could there be any **bad news**?"

To which Mary Magdalene replied,

"Jesus wants to talk to you about **Thursday night!**"

Peter was in a **heap of trouble**.

So were the **other disciples**.

The **disciples** committed **one blunder after another** on **Holy Thursday** night and on **Good Friday**.

Let's make a **list** of how the **disciples disappointed Jesus**.

Jesus went to **Gethsemane** after the Last Supper (Lk 22:39).

Jesus **asked** his **disciples to pray** with him (Lk 22:40).

What did the disciples do?

They fell asleep on him (Lk 22:45-46).

They **failed** to be his **partners in prayer**.

They were a **big disappointment**.

Then the **chief priests**, the **scribes**, and the **elders** arrived (Mt 26:47; Mk 14:43; Lk 22:52), along with a band of **soldiers** and the **temple guard** (Lk 22:52; Jn 18:3,12).

Jesus had **preached**, "**Blessed** are the **peacemakers**" (Mt 5:9a),

and, "**Love your enemies**" (Mt 5:44).

Jesus is the **Prince of Peace** (Is 9:5b).

Yet, despite what Jesus had taught his followers,

a **bystander** (Mk 14:47) or a **disciple** (Mt 26:51; Lk 22:50), **probably Peter** (Jn 18:10), took out his **sword** and **cut off** the **ear** of the **high priest's slave**.

Whoever did it,

after all that **Jesus** has taught them about **non-violence**,

this act of **aggression** was exactly **against what Jesus wanted**.

Then **Judas Iscariot**, one of Jesus' most trusted apostles,

the one who was **in charge** of the **community finances** (Jn 12:6; 13:29),

came forward and **betrayed him** with a kiss (Mt 26:48-49; Mk 14:44-45; Jn 18:2-3).

His **betrayal** was an **egregious offense** against his Master.

As **Jesus** was being **arrested**,

all of the rest of the **disciples left Jesus** and **fled** (Mt 26:56b; Mk 14:50);

except for Judas (Mt 27:3-10),

and Peter who followed him to the high priest's courtyard (Mt 26:58).

A friend in need is a friend, indeed.

When Jesus would have liked to have had the friendship and support of his **disciples**,

they **abandoned him**, concerned not about him, but about themselves.

Fleeing is **not** exactly **faithful friendship**.

Next we move to the high priest's courtyard.

There was a charcoal fire, and a big group was gathered around (Lk 22:54-55; Jn 18:18).

The maid noticed **Peter**, and asked, "You're one of his disciples, right?" (Lk 22:56,58,59);

and Peter **denied Jesus**, not once, but **three times**

(Mt 26:70,72,74; Mk 14:68,70,71; Lk 22:57,58,60; Jn 18:17,25,27)).

His **denials** were **serious blunders**,

and no way to treat his Master and friend.

Later that night **Jesus** stood **trial** before the **Sanhedrin** (Mt 26:57-68).
Many **witnesses** were called,
and they gave **false testimony** about Jesus (Mt 26:60-62).
Not a single disciple was at the trial.
Not a single disciple was willing to give testimony to refute the lies about Jesus.
Not a single disciple was there to befriend their Master as he went through this ordeal.
Their **absence** was a **serious blunder**.

The next day as **Jesus carried his Cross**,
he was **laboring** under the weight of the Cross.
He had **fallen**.
The **soldiers** could see that he might not make it to Calvary.
So the soldiers **forced Simon of Cyrene to help** Jesus carry his Cross (Lk 23:36).
Simon was from out-of-town.
Who should have been nearby to help Jesus carry his Cross?
One of his disciples.
Their **absence** was **yet another serious blunder**.

As Jesus continued toward Calvary,
a **large crowd** of people **followed him** along the way,
a group of **women** and **children**,
lamenting that Jesus should have to go through so much pain (Lk 23:27).
And **who should have been following** along?
The disciples should have been accompanying Jesus.
Their **absence** is **conspicuous**, their **behavior**, **dreadful**.

Later, Jesus crucified.
According to John,
Mary and the Beloved Disciple were at the foot of the Cross,
along with Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene (Jn 19:25-26).
Peter and Andrew, James and John,
our patron saint, Bartholomew,
and the other **apostles** were all **missing**.
What a **huge disappointment!**

When Jesus died (Lk 23:46),
there was a man standing at the foot of the Cross,
a **Roman soldier**, a **centurion**, a **pagan**,
and he cried out, “**This man** was **innocent** beyond all doubt” (Lk 23:47);
“Truly this man was the **Son of God**” (Mk 15:39).
A soldier made the statement.
It should have been made by Peter or one of the other apostles.

The **disciples committed** one **blunder** after another.
Their blunders were **more than disappointments**:
they were **offenses** against their friend.

If you were Jesus, and your disciples had let you down this badly,
how would you feel about them?
What might you be **tempted to say or do** the next time you saw them?

At a **youth Mass** I asked some children how Jesus might have felt.
One of the students replied,
“I’d be **steaming mad!**”

On another occasion I was at a **nursing home Mass**,
and we were reflecting on this gospel.
I asked the residents how Jesus felt about his apostles.
An **elderly gentlemen**, maybe **90**, in a **wheelchair**, said emphatically,
“**I’d punch ‘em out!**”

In the gospel that we just heard,
Jesus appeared to his **disciples Easter Sunday night** (Lk 24:36).
Up to this point,
Jesus had only appeared to Cleopas and Simon (Lk 24:13-31).
This was **Jesus’ first appearance** to Peter and Andrew,
James, Bartholomew, and the others.
The **disciples** were “**terrified**” (Lk 24:37).
They had **good reason** to be **afraid** after the way they had behaved.

What were the **first words that Jesus said to his disciples?**
“**Peace be with you!**” (Lk 24:36).

This is stunning.
It is tantamount to “**I forgive you.**”
“**We’re still friends.**”
“**You are still my partners.**”
“**We’re good together.**”

The **disciples did not deserve his forgiveness.**
For Jesus, it was his **gift** to them,
an incredible act of **compassion** and **kindness.**

Sometimes we are **like** those **disciples.**
Sometimes we **fall asleep** on Jesus, we **resort to violence.**
Sometimes we **deny Jesus**, either by what we say or what we do.
Sometimes we **abandon him**, or we **fail to speak up.**

If **Jesus** were to **appear at this Mass**, as he will in the Eucharist,
we have reason to be terrified, like the first apostles, because of **our failings.**
Thankfully, **Jesus’ message for you and me,**
is exactly the **same message** he had **for his apostles.**
Jesus says to us: “**Peace be with you! I forgive you!**”

Not only does the risen **Jesus forgive us**,
he wants us to forgive each other.

Every person here has someone in their **family** or a **friend**
that has **disappointed us**, committed a serious blunder,
betrayed us, or been **absent** when we needed them.

There are **times** when we have every right to be **steaming mad**.
Maybe we even want to “**punch ‘em out!**”

When you and I hold on to our **grudges**
and want to **get even**,
we **deny the power of the risen Jesus**.

When we forgive someone who has let us down,
the **risen Jesus is present**,
and it is a **new Easter!**

If Mary Magdalene were to speak to us this morning,
her Easter announcement would be,
“I’ve got some **good news**, and I’ve got **more good news**:
Jesus is risen from the dead, and
he has a **special message: Peace be with you!**”