

**“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name and you are mine.”**

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

April 7, 2018

Redeemed Conference  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Easter (Vigil Mass)  
Scheels Arena, Fargo

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name and you are mine.” As we reach the high point of this Redeemed Conference, the celebration of Mass, I want to thank all of you for being here and participating in this event. I hope this day has been a blessing for you, and that it has reminded all of us of these very important truths: God has redeemed us in his Son, he has called us by name, and he has made us his own. This all by itself could occupy our prayers and imaginations for a lifetime!

This afternoon, we celebrate the vigil Mass for Sunday in the Octave of Easter, and we hear one more episode from the Gospel of our Lord’s appearance to the apostles after his resurrection. On the evening of that first Easter Sunday, the apostles were hidden away in the Upper Room, fearful and cowering behind locked doors. And suddenly the risen Lord Jesus passed through those locked doors and stood in their midst. He appeared in his glorified humanity to the stunned apostles, and he said “Peace be with you. Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” Jesus is taking his followers to the heart of the Paschal Mystery: God’s Son became one of us so that he could die on the cross and rise from the dead for the forgiveness of sins. He defeats sin and death by the power of divine mercy. And by giving the Holy Spirit, Jesus passes this power over sin to his disciples so that it might reach all of us through the sacrament of reconciliation.

I’m sure you know that the Sunday after Easter is known as Divine Mercy Sunday, and it begins with the celebration of this Mass. The celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday was instituted by Pope St. John Paul II in the year 2000, and it really is a celebration of our redemption by the mercy of God. Every year on this day, the Church reads this gospel account of Jesus’ appearance to the disciples on Easter Sunday. It has become a time when we gather for Mass, we pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet, and hopefully we receive the sacrament of reconciliation. You could say that it is a sacred moment of truth when we allow the Risen Lord to pass through the locked door of our fearful hearts, to gaze at us with the eyes of mercy and to reveal us to ourselves.

It seems to me that the locked doors of that Upper Room are a kind of metaphor for our spiritual state. We hide behind the locked doors of our sins, the joyless prisons that we’ve made for ourselves. Our sins lock us away from love, from holiness, from charity, and even from God himself. But look what happens on that Easter evening. Just as Jesus passed through the locked doors of that Upper Room, he also passes through the locked doors of our hearts. His mercy penetrates through the locked doors that our sins have created, and he banishes those sins from us. Notice what he says to the apostles: “Peace be with you,” which is another way of saying “Do not fear.” Instead of berating them for abandoning him and losing faith, he comes to them with the gift of peace and mercy. He sets aside their sins and gives to them his own power over sin. “Whose sins you forgive they are forgiven.”

This event proves to the apostles and to people of all times that the mercy of Christ is greater than any sin. No sin is too great to keep him out; his mercy can break through those locked doors and set us free. My friends, many of our brothers and sisters have convinced themselves that God can’t do anything with them. Maybe we felt the same way once. And there are many who only see God with the eyes of fear; they think of him as angry and vengeful. Or they don’t think of him at all. But the message of mercy can overcome these fears. Not only does it help us to face up to our sins, it also gives us the way out, the way of Christ’s mercy. What a blessing to be able to receive the gift of mercy in the Sacrament of

Reconciliation at any time. What a blessing to be able to appeal to God's mercy and to be liberated from the fear of sin and death.

But it seems to me that our Lord's mercy has another effect as well. The apostles were locked in that Upper Room because they were afraid to go out; they were afraid for their lives. But after seeing Jesus, and after receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, that all changed. The apostles went out and began to speak openly about Jesus to everyone, even to those who put him to death! The mercy of Christ opened up the locked doors and sent them out to be apostles, to be missionaries, to be living witnesses of the redemption of Christ. Even Thomas, who doubted all these things ever happened, was freed of his doubts and sent out as a herald of the resurrection. Jesus didn't rebuke him or cast him out for his questions. He shows him the marks of the nails and spear, and in his mercy he urges him to believe.

My brothers and sisters, this same mercy of Jesus is unlocking doors for us as well. He is opening up the gates so we can go forth as his witnesses, as his missionary disciples. The divine mercy of God is giving us peace, so we too can fearlessly live our faith among our neighbors, not imposing it on them but showing them the joy and beauty of being a follower of Jesus Christ. The mercy of Christ gives us courage to stand up against the pressures of our culture and the opposition of those who wish to remove faith from the public square. The mercy of Christ, who is risen gives us an assurance of a life to come, a life that will be eternal, a life that will be unfailing love. When we believe in all this, we can't help but share it with others. We can't help but live it joyfully, trusting in the one who calls us by name. This mercy draws us together in the unity of the Church, which is the Body of Christ, the family of God. His mercy prepares us for the mission that Jesus gives all his followers: to be his witnesses in the world. His mercy equips us to live out the works of mercy, to be instruments of mercy and compassion to those in any need. My friends, if we allow the mercy of Jesus Christ to touch our hearts, then through us he will touch many other hearts as well.

As we conclude this Redeemed Conference, I pray that we will take with us the gift of God's mercy, a gift not only to be kept but to be given. To each of us, our Lord says: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name and you are mine."