

Sunday of the Divine Mercy
Homily of H.E. Msgr. Luigi Bonazzi, Apostolic Nuncio
Vancouver, April 27, 2014

Dear brothers and sisters,

I greet all of you with great joy. I bring and offer each one of you the greetings and paternal affection of Pope Francis. In the communion of the great family that is the Church, Pope Francis is spiritually here with us: he thanks you and blesses you.

I thank your beloved Pastor, Archbishop Michael Miller, who wanted to give me a gift: to be with you and share with you the experience of celebrating Divine Mercy Sunday on the very day when in Rome, in the presence of a great multitude, Pope Francis proclaimed as saints, two great Popes: Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II.

I will first ask you a favor: have mercy on my poor English. I rely very much upon the generosity of your attentive listening. I know, indeed, that the attention and love of those who are listening give beauty and flavor to the words of the speaker. I invite you all to be protagonists in this moment: you, listening with love; me offering to you these modest words! Thank you.

Some beautiful words of Pope Benedict XVI help me to begin my homily. In his encyclical Letter, dedicated to hope, he wrote, *“Human life is a journey. Towards what destination? How do we find the way? Life is like a voyage on the sea of history, often dark and stormy, a voyage in which we watch for the stars that indicate the route. The true stars of our life are the people who have lived good lives. They are lights of hope. Certainly, Jesus Christ is the true light, the sun that has risen above all the shadows of history.”* (Spe Salvi, no. 49)

Dear brothers and sisters: Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Risen, the Sun par excellence, accompanies us in this liturgical celebration. Let us allow the Risen Lord to take us by the hand. He is among us, just as he stood among his disciples on Easter evening, in the Upper Room, where they had gathered in fear and with the doors closed. We are today the Upper Room, the Cenacle. Jesus himself comes into our midst and says to us, *“Peace be with you.”* (John 20:26)

Let us ask: who were the people Jesus greeted when he said “Peace be with you.”? We know: they were his disciples, the apostles, who, at his arrest, fled and abandoned Jesus; one even came to deny him!

We are not so different from those disciples. We also – if we are honest – must acknowledge having denied and betrayed the love of God. We do this all those times when in our choices we are saying: “You do not interest me. I do not need your love, nor your commandments. I prefer to do what pleases me.”

What happens when Jesus appears to the disciples and shows them his hands and side marked by the wounds of the crucifixion? It is a moment of great commotion. The Gospel says, “*The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.*” The gospel does not tell us the reason for this joy but we can easily guess. We can think that, in different ways, each disciple may have thought, “I abandoned him and he comes to look for me; I betrayed the friendship of my master and he comes again to call me friend; I thought it was all over and he tells me that everything can start again; we distanced ourselves from him and he reunites us to himself and to one another.” For the disciples it is a new experience of that love which is rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4), and which Jesus taught – let us think of the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-25) – and especially manifested by his life, taking care of the poor, the sick, the sinners. The disciples discover that Jesus offers them the opportunity to rise up after the fall and that he is calling them to a new beginning.

“*Peace be with you*” Jesus says again and continues, “*As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.*” As if to say, “I have shown you the love, forgiveness and mercy of the Father: now you have to be the witnesses of the love and mercy of the Father! Go and tell others that there is no tear that cannot be dried, no sin that cannot be forgiven...”

“*Receive the Holy Spirit.*” Precisely because it is not within our own strength that we can forgive, Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who had made him exclaim on the cross, “*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*” (Luke 23:34) As we know, it is on the day of our baptism that each of us received the Holy Spirit. That day a love making us capable of loving as Jesus loves including forgiving, was given to us. Let this love flow forth from us. Let this love come alive in us. The Christian is a person forgiven who forgives; he is a child of God who, receiving the mercy of God becomes merciful.

After reminding that – in the journey of our life – Jesus is the true light, Pope Benedict XVI continues, “*But to reach him we also need lights close by – people who shine with his light and so guide us along our way.*” Who are these “lights

close by”? We know them. They are, firstly, the Virgin Mary whom with profound trust we call “Star of the Sea”, and the saints, these friends of God who are our friends, our treasures. In a particular way we can apply to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to the saints the saying: “Who finds a friend finds a treasure.”

Saint Pope John XXIII and Saint Pope John Paul II are two new treasures, two great friends that the Church gives us.

Pope John Paul II was a great apostle of mercy, by his teaching and above all, by the witness of his life. Permit me to recall with you what I consider to be the most significant example: his meeting with Ali Agca, the young Turk who had attempted to assassinate him. It was on December 27, 1983. Two years after the attempt on May 13, 1981. Pope John Paul II had gone to pay a visit to his would-be assassin in the Roman prison of Rebibbia. A personal meeting of 15 minutes took place. Leaning towards each other – the man who had used violence and the man who had suffered from violence – they looked and listened with love to each other. Once the meeting ended, the Pope went to visit some 200 women detained in the same prison and shared with them what he had experienced in the encounter with Ali Agca. He said: **“We met as men and as brothers, because we are all brothers and all the events of our lives must lead us to fraternity.”**

I have always been struck by this episode and witness. John Paul II teaches us that all life experiences, even the most painful, lead us to fraternity. It is not true – says the Pope now Saint – that discord and hatred can only generate more discord and more hatred. No! The evil that unfortunately lives within the human heart can be stopped. It’s enough to allow mercy to work within us: mercy which is the gift of the Crucified and Risen Lord, the gift that enables us to overcome evil with good, to transform enmity into friendship, and therefore to increase fraternity within the human family.

In particular, John Paul II has taught us that forgiveness and mercy are something more than pious intentions when they promote brotherhood: in other words when they lead us to see one another and treat one another as God sees and treats us: as his children. For this to happen it is necessary to constantly overcome all those emotional, temperamental, cultural and social obstacles that our personal or collective history may build. *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female”* - the apostle Paul used to remind the Christian community of Galatia – *“for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* (Gal. 3:28) In the context of the history of Canada these words may be translated in this way: there is neither English or French, Filipino or Chinese, Polish or Mexican... or rather... there are English and French, Filipinos and Chinese, Polish and

Mexicans – because the Lord respects and promotes our own history and individuality – but above all, we are all brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

A few words now on Saint Pope John XXIII. He was born in the region where I too was born: Bergamo. It is also for this reason that your Archbishop kindly did me the honor of asking me to speak to you today. Pope John XXIII. What can we say about him?

He who had been affectionately called *il Papa buono*, “the good Pope” had a secret. He was faithful to a resolution made since he was a young priest: to transform into an opportunity for goodness every situation of life, thanks to the power of prayer and charity. He pledged to keep from all bitterness, to avoid anger and personal outbursts, to have for all a happy and smiling patience. He made as his own, the aspiration taken from the Gospel, “Jesus, meek and humble of heart (Mt. 11:29), make my heart like unto thine.” Belonging to a family of humble and modest farmers, he knew that it was precisely the meek and gentle that Jesus promised would “inherit the earth.” (Mt. 5:5) Yes, in the end, it is neither violence nor arrogance but goodness, the spirit of kindness, gentleness and peace that conquers hearts. Of all these things, Saint Pope John XXIII is a living example.

Lord, help us to be instruments of peace and mercy. Help us to give and to receive pardon. Help us to see the others not as strangers but as brothers, perhaps different but always brothers, and to work together to build a civilization of love. Then we will rejoice. Then all of us, like the disciples when they saw the Lord, will experience joy. The true joy. Amen.