



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

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Second Sunday of Easter, 18 April 2004

1. On Good Friday, as he hung on the Cross, Jesus bequeathed to us his testament of forgiveness: "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*" (Lk 23: 34). Jeered and tormented, *he implored mercy for his torturers*. In this way his wide-open arms and pierced side became the universal sacrament of the fatherly tenderness of God, who offers forgiveness and reconciliation to all.

When he appeared to his disciples on the day of the Resurrection, the Lord greeted them with these words: "*Peace be with you*", and showed them his hands and his side with the marks of the passion. Eight days later, as we read in today's Gospel, Jesus once again came and stood among them in the Upper Room, and once again said to them: "*Peace be with you*" (cf. Jn 20: 19-26).

2. *Peace is the gift par excellence of the crucified and Risen Christ*, the result of the victory of his love over sin and death. In offering himself as an immaculate victim of expiation on the altar of the Cross, he poured out on humanity the beneficial flow of Divine Mercy.

Jesus, therefore, is *our peace*, because he is *the perfect manifestation of Divine Mercy*. In the human heart, which is an abyss always exposed to the temptation of evil, he infuses God's merciful love.

3. Today, the Second Sunday of Easter, we are celebrating *Divine Mercy Sunday*. The Lord is also sending us out to bring to everyone his peace, which is founded on pardon and the forgiveness of sins. This is an extraordinary gift, which he desired to link with the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. How deeply humanity needs to experience the effectiveness of God's mercy in these times marked by growing uncertainty and violent conflicts!

May Mary, Mother of Christ our Peace, who received his testament of love on Calvary, help us to be witnesses and apostles of his infinite mercy.

I now address a special greeting to the pilgrims from various nations who have gathered here on the occasion of Divine Mercy Sunday. Dear friends, I ask you to be witnesses of God's merciful love, after the example of St Faustina Kowalska.

I wish everyone a good Sunday!

Appeal for the hostages' release in Iraq

I am following with deep sorrow the sad news that comes to us from the Holy Land and from Iraq. May the bloodshed of our brethren cease! Such inhuman acts are contrary to God's will.

I am particularly close in my thoughts and prayers to all the families who fear for the fate of their loved ones, especially those who have been taken hostage.

I ask the kidnappers to act in a humane way. I implore them to give the persons they are holding back to their families, as I pray our merciful Lord to grant reconciliation and peace to the peoples of the Holy Land and Iraq, and to all who work for reconciliation and peace in those regions.

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