

**Jesus Gives the Power to “Forgive” and “Retain” Sins  
(2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter/Divine Mercy Sunday, Year A)**

**Acts 2:42-47—The Early Church**

1. Doctrine: “the teaching of the apostles”
2. Community: “the fellowship” or “communion” (Greek *koinōnia*)
3. Sacraments: “the breaking of bread”
4. Prayer: “the prayers”

**Psalm 118—Give Thanks to the Lord, for He is Good**

1. Let everyone say: “his mercy (Hebrew *hesed*) endures forever!”
2. The Stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone (vv. 22-24)

**1 Peter 1:3-9—The Hope of the Resurrection of Jesus**

1. “Born anew” to a “living hope through the resurrection” (1:3)
2. Our inheritance: “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading...” (1:4)
3. Without Having Seen: you “love him” and “believe in him” (1:8)

**John 20:19-31—The Power to Forgive and the Doubt of Thomas**

1. Jesus Gives the Disciples the Power to Forgive Sins (Easter Sunday “evening”)
  - a. “Peace be with you” (Hebrew *shalom*)
  - b. Apostles: those who are “sent”
  - c. Power to *forgive* sins
  - d. Power to *retain* sins
  - e. Thomas shows up late... and demands *physical* proof
2. Jesus Appears to Thomas and the Disciples (8 Days Later = Today!)
  - a. “Peace be with you”
  - b. Jesus invites Thomas to touch and see and believe
  - c. Thomas’ Confession: “My Lord (*kyrios*) and my God (*theos*)” (20:28)
  - d. Beatitude for those who believe *without* seeing

**The Origins of the Sacrament of Confession**

1. Common Question: “Why do I need to go to a Priest to be forgiven?”
2. God alone forgives Sin (CCC 1441; cf. Mark 2:7)
3. Jesus gives the Apostles the power to forgive sins (CCC 1442, citing John 20:21-23!)
4. Council of Trent (1551 A.D.):

*[T]he Lord instituted the sacrament of penance, principally when after his Resurrection he breathed upon his disciples and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” [John 20:22f.]. (Council of Trent, , Session 14; DS 1670).*

## St. John Paul II: Mercy at the Heart of Jesus Message

[M]ercy constitutes the fundamental content of the messianic message of Christ and the constitutive power of His mission. (John Paul II, *The Mercy of God*, no. 6)

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter, Year A)

1. According to the Gospel of John, one of the first things Jesus did on Easter Sunday was give the disciples the power to forgive and retain sins. The Church interprets this event as the origins of the sacrament of confession (see CCC 1442). Have you ever connected this passage with the power of confession before? How do you think other Christians who do not have this sacrament would interpret this passage?

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2. Have you ever struggled with doubt in Jesus’ resurrection? Can you sympathize with “doubting Thomas”? What does the account of Jesus’ encounter with Thomas reveal to you about how Jesus deals with doubt? And what do you make of his “blessing” upon all those who believe *without* seeing?

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3. What parallels can you see between the four features of the early Church described in Acts 2 and the four parts of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*?

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### For Further Study

1. CCC 1420-1498: This section of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* contains the Church’s official teaching the sacrament of reconciliation. It is essential reading.
2. Scott Hahn. *Lord’ Have Mercy: The Healing Power of Confession*. An excellent, easy-to-read book on the biblical roots of confession. A great resource to give to people who have questions about why the Church practices sacramental confession.
3. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia* (The Mercy of God) (1980). A must read for anyone interested in Divine Mercy Sunday. (available at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30111980\\_dives-in-misericordia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30111980_dives-in-misericordia.html))