

Sunday April 24, 2022

Second Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy)

## Parishioner Reflection

*By: Edmond Lo*

I was following Steve Weidenkopf's 20-CD series, "Epic – A Journey Through Church History" during this Lent. Listening to it on and off while driving, I felt as though the enormity of 2000 years of Church history were happening right inside the small cabin of my car. The works of the Holy Spirit, how He animated the Church and "guided [her] into all the truth" through her ups and downs in history (John 16:13); persecutions and martyrs; apostles, popes, bishops and emperors; heresies and ecumenical councils; schisms, reformations, and enlightenments – through Weidenkopf's vivid and captivating presentations, famous historical events and characters from ancient times suddenly came alive before my eyes as I navigated my way through the traffics.

Like a time machine, this Sunday's readings take us right back to the ground zero where everything I heard from Steve Weidenkopf was originated. As we listen to the proclamation of the inspired word of God, we feel as though we were "caught up in Spirit on the Lord's day" - like John in the second reading - and learn how the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church was made visible to the world through miracles, wonders, visions, and signs (Rev 1:10).

When Jesus and his apostles appeared at the grand stage of history, Israel had endured many centuries of political domination and suppression by foreign powers. Its desires to restore the glory days of the Davidic kingdom, fueled by predictions and promises of the prophets, had never been more intense. Ironically when the time for the fulfillment of such desires finally arrived, the Jews were unable to understand and recognize it. The New Davidic Kingdom, established by Christ in the divine institution of the Church, "was made manifest to the world on the day of Pentecost by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:1-13, CCC 1076). In the first reading, we see how this Kingdom continued to grow as a result of the works of the Holy Spirit. Soon after the Holy Spirit had descended on the Church in a special way at Pentecost, "signs and wonders were done among the people at the hands of the apostles" so that "great numbers of men and women were added" to the believers (Acts 5:12, 14).

Prompted by the Spirit, the apostles also left Jerusalem and Palestine over the years to spread the gospel to other cities and nations. One of them, John, found himself exiled to the island of Patmos where he "was caught up in spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev 1:10).

He was asked to write down what he saw. His prophetic words and visions have been handed down to us as one of the most intriguing books of the Bible - the Book of Revelation.

Equally intriguing, if not more so, is the resurrected Christ's appearance to the Twelve, minus Thomas, in this Sunday's gospel account. We don't claim to know what it's like to live in a resurrected body. It's a mystery nobody can fathom until we actually experience it at the Last Day when all of us, alive or dead, good or bad, will rise again, either to the resurrection of life or to the resurrection of judgment (CCC 998, Thess 4:6-17). But this much we know: Jesus' appearance was not a playful display of shock and awe meant to terrify his wide-eyed disciples to the core of their being. Rather, it had a very serious and urgent purpose that Jesus must accomplish soon after his resurrection. He made this clear when he told them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (John 20:22-23).

That, my friend, is why we go to confession. What we see in this Sunday's gospel account is a bestowal of the Spirit on the apostles for the specific ministry of forgiving sins. Through apostolic succession and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the same ministry has been handed down through the ages to the bishops and priests of the present day. It's the Holy Spirit who made the empowerment of the apostles and their successors possible. He and his works, made visible to the Church through miracles, wonders, visions, and signs, are the common thread that weaves its way marvelously through the three readings of this Sunday. As the psalmist of this Sunday's Psalm reading suggests, on this special Sunday of Divine Mercy, let's "give thanks to the Lord" on hearing these powerful scriptural passages; for "His mercy endures forever" (Ps 118:1-4)!

*About the author: Edmond Lo is new to the parish, joining us in April 2021 when he and his wife, Josephine, moved from Markham to Aurora. Retired but still very active in conducting spiritual formation ministries, Edmond has a Master of Theological Studies degree (MTS) from St. Augustine's Seminary of Toronto. His career background before retirement was accounting and financial management*