

Happy Easter!! Easter's not just a one-day affair, the resurrection is so essential that we celebrate for 50 days! This gives us time to reflect on our Lenten experience and incorporate new insights, just like the Early Church reflects on how they will follow the gospel of Jesus after he is resurrected.

I work in the Software industry, and we use a process called "Agile" which focusses on adapting to change. Work is divided into "sprints," 2-to-4 week periods designated for building specific features into our product. At the end of each sprint, we have a "Retrospective," a one-hour meeting to discuss how things went during the sprint. Now that Easter is here, let's do a little retrospective on our Lenten "sprint."

During a retrospective or "retro" as we call them, we look at what went well, and what DIDN'T go well. What brought you closer to God and what caused you to lose your way? Sometimes the negative things are caused by some unexpected event that throws us for a loop, so we need to come up with a new approach to better prepared next time.

As you begin your Lenten "Retro," consider both personal and the community aspects. On the personal side, we think about our own relationship with God. Look at Thomas in the gospel, he is suffering from severe doubt after the resurrection. Something unexpected happened, he was gone when Jesus came to see the apostles, and now he's reluctant to believe them, when they share the news of Christ's return from the dead.

As we reflect on our journey as a community, consider today's reading from Acts, and the life adjustments made by Christ's disciples. They've gone from following Jesus out of curiosity and hope to uprooting their lives and becoming His church. We read, "They devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles, and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers." Like Thomas, they encountered something unexpected, the death of their leader. But with His resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit, they make the adjustments and let Christ continue to lead their lives.

So, as we look at our Lenten experience, the good AND the bad, let's think about whether the results met our EXPECTATIONS. Did we follow through with our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving? Did our efforts yield the desired fruit? If you're NOT feeling a solid "yes" OR are satisfied with your Lent but want more, then maybe a dose of DEVINE MERCY is in order.

I know many of you are familiar with St. Faustina, a young, Polish nun and mystic, whose faith made Divine Mercy Sunday a reality. In 1931, Jesus appeared to Faustina wearing a white garment with red and pale rays emanating from his heart. He requested she paint an image of him with the signature: "Jesus, I trust in You." Over the years this image has been venerated in Poland and throughout the world." The Divine Mercy Chaplet, documented by St Faustina in here 600 page diary, has been prayed here at St James for over 20 years.

Jesus said to Sister Faustina, "The graces from My mercy are drawn by ONE vessel, and that vessel is TRUSTFULNESS. The more trustful a soul is, the more it will receive. Souls that have boundless trust are a great comfort to Me, for into such souls I pour ALL the treasures of My graces." Divine mercy reminds us that we can NOT ONLY be FORGIVEN of our past ways, but are supported and guarded when faced with opposition in our new lives.

Mercy and Trust are directly connected. We see it in our personal relationship with Jesus in the example of St Thomas when Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." That's us, and Jesus is calling us to a deeper trust in God. We see trust playing out in a more communal sense in the first reading, "All who believed were together and had all things in common, they would sell their possessions and property and divide them among all in accordance with each one's need." The Early Christians not only trusted God, but they trusted EACH OTHER to not take advantage of the contributions each made according to their means.

As I reflect on this past Lent, what went well were the times we were together as a community. The Fish Feasts were especially fulfilling, certainly from the sense of satisfying our appetites, but also spiritually satisfying as an opportunity to get to know each other outside of worship. The Holy Week masses and services were also a highlight as we all grew closer to Jesus by RE-LIVING his Passion and Resurrection. It was during this time that I realized that the St. James community is a gift from our Savior. If he had not died on the cross, we wouldn't be sharing our lives together and making friends, just like the disciples, "in the temple area praying and breaking bread."

As we take time for our "retro," I want to take a moment to talk about another Fish-Feast-like opportunity to gather, eat and support our youth as they prepare to advance in their faith journeys. In late July, 50 of our young people will make a pilgrimage to sacred sites in France and meet up with Pope Francis in Portugal.

We live in a time when many young people are questioning their faith. Our secular society leaves many of our youth in the minority when it comes to believing in God and the Church. The World Youth Day pilgrimage will be an opportunity to build community with 400,000 other young believers from around the world. When our youth return, their own retrospectives will be inspired as they make decisions about faith, life, and family when they leave home and build their own futures. The Gala for this pilgrimage is in two weeks. By helping our youth encounter Jesus, we encounter Him, become part of the pilgrimage, and renew our Church in the world.

As we continue with our Holy Mass and celebrate with Easter joy, let's sync up with Jesus at a personal and community level, listen for his direction as St Faustina did, and let his Divine Mercy lead us into our next sprint.