

**THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER; Cycle - B; April 14<sup>th</sup> 2024**  
**Acts 3: 13-15, 17-19; 1 Jn. 2: 1-5; LK 24: 35-48**

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The major religions unanimously believe that the world order has been destroyed sometime with the sins of mankind. So they warn their followers against the wrath of God and the punishment for sins. Some religions give so much emphasis on sin and punishment than the mercy and forgiveness of God. Christianity teaches that Jesus became man so that the sinners may be brought to repentance and be saved, instead of being condemned and punished for their sins. Jesus does not stop with the consequence of sins alone, which is the loss of eternal life indeed; rather he offers the means to receive forgiveness of God by which we can be acquitted and enjoy eternal life.

During his public ministry, instead of speaking much about sins and sinners, Jesus preached more about **repentance and forgiveness of sins**. He started his ministry with the invitation to repentance. *In the very beginning, according to Mark 1:14 Jesus proclaims to the people, “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel.* This was the sum and substance of the entire teachings of all the Prophets too. They pleaded with the people to repent and come back to the Lord. In today’s gospel which has the setting of the post resurrection, Jesus re-emphasizes the same point such as **“Repentance, for forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.”**

In the first reading, Peter points out to the Jews the grave mistake and sin they committed by crucifying Jesus. But at the same time he does not condemn them rather invite them to acknowledge their sins and seek God’s forgiveness by repenting. Despite the great sacrifice Jesus made for the sinners, it is a fact that people fail over and again with the same sins. That is why in today’s second reading John assures us, **“But if anyone does sin. We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. He is the expiation of our sins.”** *This is what in today’s gospel Jesus commands his Apostles that they should go out and preach the good news of repentance and forgiveness of sins to the whole world.* Jesus gave his apostles the authority to forgive sins. In John’s gospel Jesus says, **“Whose sins you forgive are forgiven and, whose sins you retain are retained” (John 20:23).**

**Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation the forgiveness of sins is granted to all who repent.** Together with the commandment of preaching the

repentance and forgiveness Jesus also warns indirectly the Apostles against their possible tendency to condemn the Jewish authority who crucified him and any others who would refuse to accept their teachings. In St. John's gospel 3: 17 Jesus declares that in God's court there is no room for condemnation; rather love. Jesus says, *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him."* This truth is repeated in the Letter to the Hebrews where the author says, *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help"* (Heb. 4: 15-16). Please remember, Jesus is the most compassionate religious leader in the history and Christianity is the most tolerant religion of all the religions. **The word mercy occurs 296 times in the Old Testament and 43 times in the New Testament; the word forgiveness appears 127 times in both Old Testament and New Testament.**

Today the great message of Jesus on repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached through you and me, his disciples. For we enjoy the same from him. Though we are the disciples of Jesus who always forgave sinners and got them back, you and I have the tendency in us to condemn people who refuse to do the right things or who will not do things the way we want. **But as disciples of Jesus we too should bear witness to the forgiveness of Jesus by forgiving our fellowmen and tolerating their failures.** When we meet someone who may be away from God or not doing the right things in life, instead of condemning that person, we have to encourage him/her showing the forgiveness and love of Jesus. Sometimes, a welcoming word from the fellow Christians and the priest can win the heart of somebody who may be looking for a welcome and support. The assurance of God's forgiveness will lead that person to repentance and conversion. We should be grateful that we are the children of a compassionate God who seeks always the return of a stray away sheep. In Ezekiel God says, **"For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies. Return and live"** (Ezekiel 18:32). The two great parables of Jesus in Luke chapter 15, **the Lost sheep and the Prodigal son** are the best examples of God's unlimited compassion and forgiveness to a lost sheep.