

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER – YEAR B

The Sunday after Easter has been kept as the **Feast of Divine Mercy** by the Roman Catholic Church and some other churches since 2000. On this day we are called to reflect more personally on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the blessings we have received. The focus is on God's compassion, reminding us that the risen Lord offers us love that pardons, reconciles, and opens our own hearts to love.

Second Reading 1 John 5: 1–6

Today and through the remaining Sundays of Eastertide, we read from the first of the three Epistles of John. However, this is no ordinary letter, not least because it lacks opening and concluding greetings: some suggest it is perhaps better seen as a sermon or exhortation. Though probably not written by the author of St John's Gospel himself, it shares many similarities with the Gospel, particularly in the way that it emphasises the centrality of love.

The epistle begins with an introduction outlining the historical reality of the Christian message, and moves on to address the question of sin, the commandments, false teachers, living as children of God, the two spirits, God's inspirational love and the question of faith. The conclusion is followed by an epilogue.

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ ...

Today's text comes from the final chapter. It emphasises the importance of the humanity of Jesus ('the blood') rather than placing all the emphasis on Christ's divinity. For John, that would not do justice to the reality of what God has done for us in Christ.

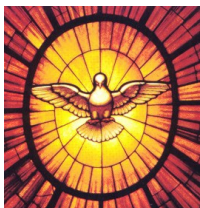
If we have faith that Jesus is the Son of God (begotten or born of God), we too are children of God. John repeats the importance of this act of faith (vv. 5–6), here referring to Jesus's humanity as 'the blood', an allusion to his death on the cross.

Jesus Christ who came with water and blood ...

At the time John wrote his epistle, some apparently denied the true humanity of Jesus. They accepted his baptism (*he came with water*) but denied that he really died on the cross, suffering as any man would (*he came with blood*). They held that he only 'seemed' human. In his Gospel, John stresses the importance of blood and water coming out of the side of Jesus on the cross (John 19: 34–35).

The Spirit is another witness ... the Spirit is truth

The presence of the Holy Spirit, the gift of his resurrection, together with the '*water and blood*' – the baptism and death of Jesus – gives witness to God's testimony.



Gospel John 20: 19–31

John's intention

In Chapter 20, John is concerned with the different ways in which the characters involved come to believe in the risen Lord.

Following her initial disbelief (see last week: John 20: 1–9), Mary only recognises Jesus as the risen Lord when she sees him and hears him speak her name (20: 16–18).

It was only 'the other disciple' who, according to John, believed immediately on entering and seeing the empty tomb.

From fear to joy

This week we continue with John's account of the Resurrection appearances, moving from the empty tomb to the upper room where we 'witness' two scenes that take place eight days apart.

The first event highlights the dramatic change in the mood of the disciples. They were terrified that those responsible for Jesus's death might hunt them down and kill them too. But now, [they] '*were filled with joy when they saw the Lord ...*'

This is the fulfilment of Jesus's words to them before his crucifixion (see John 16: 22) '*...you are sad now, but I shall see you again, and your hearts will be full of joy...*'. For them, too, belief comes through seeing.

From doubt to belief

The second event occurs eight days later when Jesus returns to the upper room and invites Thomas to touch his wounds. Thomas had doubted that his friends had seen the Lord, but Jesus is giving him the proof he needs to believe that he has indeed risen. He urges him to '*Doubt no longer, but believe.*' We are not told if Thomas did accept Jesus's invitation to touch him, but he is now able to make his profession of faith: '*My Lord and my God!*'

A note to the reader

John concludes his account of these appearances by speaking directly to us. The events he has chosen to record are those which he believes will best lead us to grow in faith in the person of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God.

He is reviewing the disciples' different reactions for the benefit of the people of his own time, his fellow first-century Christians.

Theologians believe that John intended these verses (30–31) to conclude his Gospel, and that Chapter 21 is a later addition.