

SUNDAY PLUS

To see or not to see?

Divine Mercy



Re-enactment of Napoleon's Army. veleknez / Shutterstock.com

by Fr Denis McBride
C.Ss.R.

A story that I heard many years ago as a student is one I have always treasured, not least because it highlights the uniqueness of the gift of mercy.

The tale is told of a young French soldier who deserted Napoleon's army but who, within a matter of hours, was captured by his own troops. To discourage soldiers from abandoning their posts the penalty for desertion was death: there would be no trial, no defence, just a sure judgement. The runaway soldier's mother was Napoleon's principal cook. When she heard what had happened she went to beg the great military commander to spare the life of her son. She went

on her knees, pleading for mercy. Napoleon heard her plea but pointed out that because of the serious nature of the crime her son had committed he clearly did not deserve mercy. "I know he doesn't deserve mercy," the mother answered. "It would not be mercy if he deserved it."

I don't know about this woman's culinary abilities, but wasn't she a good theologian? That is the point about mercy: nobody deserves it. Everyone deserves true justice. Mercy, on the other hand, is sheer gift. Mercy cancels out wrongs and transgressions – not because a sparkling defence has been found or excusing causes have been skilfully argued but – because that is the considered response of the one who is grieved. Mercy does not suggest that the guilty are not guilty: it recognises the wrongdoing but does not demand satisfaction for the wrong. In all this, mercy reflects the utter graciousness of the one who has been wronged. So today we celebrate the feast of the everlasting Divine Mercy.

Fr Denis McBride's many books, CDs and DVDs are available from Redemptorist Publications, www.rpbooks.co.uk

Doubt

by Dr Barbara Spender

I once asked my husband (a scientist) why he believed – to him it was "obvious." He didn't need to think about it or to analyse. He didn't need "proof." Not all of us have that gift. The different approaches to faith were, for me, highlighted in a recent discussion where one participant's honest uncertainty was met by another with the comment "Doubt is a sin."

Maybe that's true of the cynic's doubt, the doubt that takes nothing at face value and looks for deceit in everything but, more often, doubt simply means that we want to know more. We are brought up to

be cautious, not to accept everything at face value. And of course, there is nothing as convincing as personal experience.

The honest doubt of an enquiring mind, wanting to share other people's experiences and understanding, can be positive and constructive. And it's just part of being human.

Dr Barbara Spender is a freelance editor and also a local magistrate.

Lord, open the eyes of my heart.
Let me see you everywhere and in every person I meet. Amen.

"If I encounter a person sleeping outdoors on a cold night, I can view him or her as an annoyance, an idler, an obstacle in my path, a troubling sight, a problem for politicians to sort out, or even a piece of refuse cluttering a public space. Or I can ... see in this person a human being with a dignity identical to my own."

Pope Francis

Seeing and believing

by Sr Thérèse Garman SMP

The disciples are gathered fearfully behind locked doors, Thomas, courageously, had ventured out. When he returns they tell him they've seen the Lord. If that's true, and the Holy Spirit has empowered them for mission, why are they still locked up? Unsurprisingly, he doubts their story.

Thomas finally gets a personal encounter with the living Jesus. This makes a difference to all of them. They unlock the doors, go out and live lives reflecting the

amazing Good News. Jesus enters the locked places of our lives empowering us to go out into a world desperately in need of seeing and believing.

John's emphasis on the locked doors also relates to the power of divine mercy. It not only unlocks our hearts, but challenges us to keep them unlocked. Are we living in the freedom and joy of the resurrection or behind locked doors? Jesus doesn't open the doors for us, but gives us all we need to open them to a new way of being.

Sr Thérèse Garman is a Sister of Our Lady of Providence.

Today: Acts 5:12-16
Monday: Acts 4:23-31 John 3:1-8
Tuesday: Acts 4:32-37 John 3:7-15
(E) St George (Solemnity) Apocalypse 12:10-12 John 15:18-21 or 15:1-8
Wednesday: Acts 5:17-26 John 3:16-21
Thursday: Acts 5:27-33 John 3:31-36
Friday: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 John 14:6-14
Saturday: Acts 6:1-7 John 6:16-21
(E) The English Martyrs (Feast) Acts 5:27-32, 40-41 Acts 7:55-60 Matthew 10:17-20
Next Sunday: Acts 5:11-14 John 21:1-19