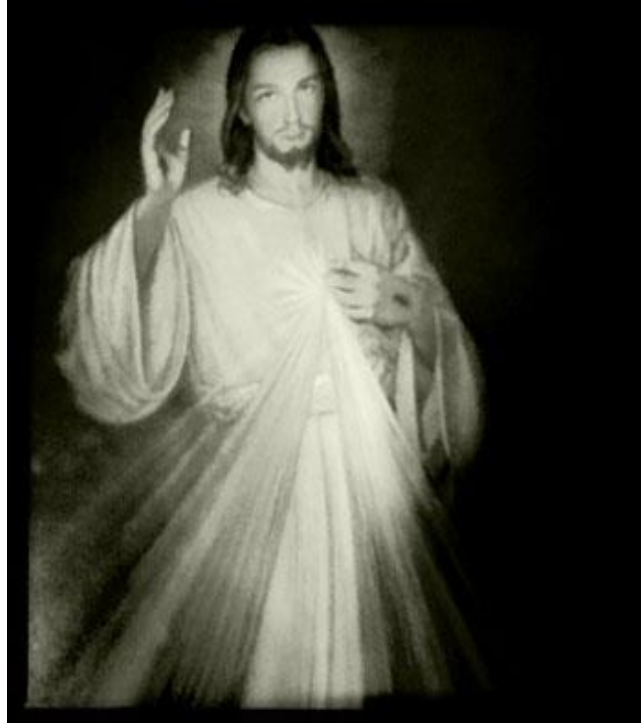


# FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY



## Second Week of Easter

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**Divine Mercy Sunday** (also known as the **Feast of the Divine Mercy**) is celebrated on the Second Sunday of Easter, the final day of the Easter Octave. It sprang from a vision of St Faustina Kowalska, on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1937, in which Jesus promised a plenary indulgence to those who, under the usual rules, go to Confession and then receive Holy Communion. The image, as seen by St Faustina, is displayed on Divine Mercy Sunday. The devotion was commended by St John Paul II in June 2002 and his death and subsequent canonisation took place round Divine Mercy Sunday.

# Monday in the Second Week of Easter

## Reading

*Acts 4:23-31 (RSV)*

*The Believers Pray for Boldness*

<sup>23</sup> When Peter and John were released they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. <sup>24</sup> And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, 'Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, <sup>25</sup> who by the mouth of our father David, your servant did say by the Holy Spirit,

**'Why did the Gentiles rage,  
and the peoples imagine vain things?**

**<sup>26</sup> The kings of the earth set themselves in array,  
and the rulers were gathered together,  
against the Lord and against his Anointed'—**

<sup>27</sup> for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup> to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. <sup>29</sup> And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, <sup>30</sup> while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.' <sup>31</sup> And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.

## Reflection

**AT THE** beginning of Acts 4, we find the apostles effectively preaching the Gospel and apparently making about five thousand converts – a large number which contrasts with the small number of those in authority who aim to stop them. Peter and John are taken into custody but, once released, they find their feet, discovering that it is now they who are the leaders of the people. They re-join the apostolic circle and, having been repulsed once, resolve to seek empowerment from the Lord. Just as Moses was rejected by the people and had to renew his efforts (7:37-38) and as Jesus himself was rejected but was finally raised to the right hand of the

Father, so the apostles are strengthened by the experience of rejection and refreshed once more to speak the word of God with boldness.

## Tuesday in the Second Week of Easter

### Reading

*Acts 4:32-37 (RSV)*

*The Believers share their Possessions*

<sup>32</sup> Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. <sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold <sup>35</sup> and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. <sup>36</sup> Thus Joseph who was surnamed by the apostles Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, <sup>37</sup> sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

### Reflection

**THIS** passage is sometimes interpreted as showing that the Early Church was governed by socialist principles. Certainly, if that was the case, these principles – and the holding of everything in common – were not in force in the medium to long term. We glimpse the Church at the point at which it is compact and radical enough to act in interdependent ways which nowadays we should associate with a religious community. What St Luke is describing is a distinctly Greek understanding of friendship – something very different from the Hebrew tradition – where being 'of one heart and soul' is the essence of true friendship. The pooling of possessions arose from this friendship and is what one would expect to find in a radical community. The early Church was indeed a radical community. The phrase 'laid it at the apostles' feet', used more than once, is about obedient submission and Barnabas' gift of the proceeds from selling a field show the depth of commitment. St Luke may be drawing on Greek ideas of friendship but the emphasis on helping the needy is undeniably Hebrew. As it says in Deut 15:4 'But there will be no poor among you (for the LORD will bless you in the land which the LORD your God gives you for an inheritance to possess)'.

# Wednesday in the Second Week of Easter

## Reading

*Acts 5:17-26 (RSV)*

### *The Apostles Are Persecuted*

<sup>17</sup> The high priest rose up and all who were with him, that is, the party of the Sad'ducees, and filled with jealousy <sup>18</sup> they arrested the apostles and put them in the common prison. <sup>19</sup> But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, <sup>20</sup> 'Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.' <sup>21</sup> And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and taught.

Now the high priest came and those who were with him and called together the council and all the senate of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. <sup>22</sup> But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, and they returned and reported, <sup>23</sup> 'We found the prison securely locked and the sentries standing at the doors, but when we opened it we found no one inside.' <sup>24</sup> Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were much perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. <sup>25</sup> And some one came and told them, 'The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.' <sup>26</sup> Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but without violence, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

## Reflection

**JUST** before this passage, St Luke has placed the apostles in a position of authority – new leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel – in Solomon's Portico in the temple. They are figures of awe – people are afraid to approach them and are content to stand in Peter's shadow. The apostles themselves draw more and more converts to them, and people bring along their sick to be healed. These are the days of 'signs and wonders' and the leaders of the religious Establishment seek urgently to deal with the challenge. The apostles are arrested but, such is their power, the prison cannot hold them. They are quietly arrested again – quietly because there is a real danger that the public would treat the officers as blasphemers and stone them.

## Thursday in the Second Week of Easter

### Reading

*Acts 5:27-33 (RSV)*

<sup>27</sup> And when the officials had brought the apostles, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, <sup>28</sup> saying, 'We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.' <sup>29</sup> But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men. <sup>30</sup> The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup> God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup> And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.'

<sup>33</sup> When they heard this they were enraged and wanted to kill them.

### Reflection

**THIS** is the second trial of the apostles before the 'Great Sanhedrin' which met in the Temple, in a building called the Hall of Hewn Stones. This religious court convened every day except on the sabbath and at festivals. There is an unmistakable confrontation here: the Sanhedrin accuse the apostles of bringing 'this man's blood upon us' – in effect blaming the Jewish religious leaders for the death of Jesus, rather than the Romans, the occupying power, who carried out the execution. In response, Peter and the apostles attribute guilt to the religious leaders for the death of Jesus 'whom you killed by hanging him on a tree'. As elsewhere in the New Testament, the policy is clearly not to over-emphasise the role of the Roman authorities. Also striking in today's readings is the way Peter and the apostles are not cowed by the authorities. In contrast with Jesus, who said very little in his trial, the apostles speak out. These are no longer the frightened men, dismayed by the death of their leader. From St Luke's perspective, they are the leaders of the New Israel, standing up to the leaders of the Old Israel.

## Friday in the Second Week of Easter.

### Reading

*Acts 5:34-42 (RSV)*

A Pharisee in the council named Gama'li-el, a teacher of the law, held in honour by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a while. <sup>35</sup> And he said to them, 'Men of Israel, take care what you do

with these men. <sup>36</sup> For before these days Theu'das arose, giving himself out to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was slain and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. <sup>37</sup> After him Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. <sup>38</sup> So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; <sup>39</sup> but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!

<sup>40</sup> So they took his advice, and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. <sup>41</sup> Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name. <sup>42</sup> And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

## Reflection

**THERE** were 71 members of the Great Sanhedrin. Included were priests and levites and ordinary Jews whose blood line was such that their daughters would be deemed acceptable to marry priests. These then were the cream of Jewish society and it is in such company that the pharisee, Gamaliel, held an honourable place. He was not only a teacher of the law but clearly a profoundly spiritual man. He realised that, in all likelihood, this new religious movement would not last long and also that, if it did prove to be lasting, any opposition would be opposition to the divine will. From this incident we have the 'Gamaliel principle'. It suited St Luke to allow us to infer, from the 'Gamaliel principle', that the growth of the Christian Church was in accordance with the divine will. We notice too that the apostles took pride in being persecuted for the name of Jesus and that they were encouraged to teach and preach with increased fervour.