

Dear brothers and sisters, what we celebrate in these days is the heart of our faith. What is it that we believe? What makes a Christian? We believe that Jesus is risen from the dead, that he died for our sins, that his dying and rising is a sign of God's love for us, for each individual. That is what we believe in a nutshell. These simple truths are known as the kerygma, the essential Christian proclamation: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, he was raised from the dead and appeared to the Twelve. These statements are at the heart of the Creed we recite every Sunday. They are what we assented to, directly or through our sponsors, at baptism. The kerygma is the essence of what we believe.

And what do we mean by believe? What is faith? Faith is the acceptance of the Creed, of the kerygma. And what do we mean by acceptance? It first of all means assent: yes, I accept that Christ died and rose for me, taking away my sins out of love. But that assent is more than intellectual. It is an acceptance of the heart. It means we let ourselves be won over by the message of this overwhelming love. It means we give our heart to the one who died for us. It is the acceptance not just of ideas but of a person, Jesus Christ, God and man, the proof of our Father's love for us. Faith means accepting him as the new foundation of our lives, it means building one's life on him. It means even more: it means allowing him to give us himself, his own risen life. It means living by a new principle. It means accepting a new power, a divine power, and being transformed by that power.

You remember that our Archbishop wrote us a pastoral letter last fall. He entitled it "Partakers of the Divine Nature." That is what faith brings about in us, a share in God's very nature. This is so amazing that one might be tempted to say it's beautiful rhetoric, but it can't mean what it says. How can this weak flesh that I am, so imperfect, so transitory, so wayward, be called divine? Yet we believe that to be the case and we find it said many times in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. I have in me the principle of a divine life, I am a branch growing on the vine of Christ. He lives in me, bringing life out of death and holiness out of sin. My salvation is far from complete; it has only begun, but as

St. Peter told us, that salvation is laid up for us in heaven, and through the virtue of hope we already possess it. Christ is giving us the fortitude to endure earthly trials as we are being formed in his likeness.

In the opening prayer of today's Mass we asked that we might rightly understand in what font we have been washed, by whose Spirit we have been reborn, by whose Blood we have been redeemed. Baptism is the sign of our incorporation by faith into the body of Christ. It gives us a new birth to divine life by the Holy Spirit. It washes us clean in the blood of the Lamb. These are old doctrines that we need to hear again and again, each day, each recurring year. Each day we need to recall these truths, invite this risen Lord Jesus deeper into our hearts. There is no end to this process until we arrive in heaven. There will always be more of our hearts that need to be touched and transformed by Christ. The more we are convinced of this on a day-to-day basis, the more we will become the evangelizers that the Church of today seeks. The more we will want to tell others about the joy of our relationship with the risen Jesus, of the unsurpassed and limitless love of the Lord for us. Many people today don't know about that love, yet it's the one thing they most want and need to hear.

At the heart of divine love is mercy, the mainspring of all God's actions, the mercy shown in the sending of his Son to die for us when we had failed to love him. That is the mercy we celebrate on this Mercy Sunday, instituted by John Paul II, whom the Church today has given us, along with Pope John XXIII, as a saint. Let us renew our faith in that divine mercy. As we encounter Christ like the early Christians in the breaking of the bread, let us assimilate his mercy so that we may become ambassadors of his mercy in our world.

May I conclude by asking our two new saints to pray for us.

Saint John XXIII, pray for us.

Saint John Paul II, pray for us.