2nd Sunday of Easter 2025

On 16th August 1917, Willie Doyle was killed in action at Passchendaele. A Jesuit priest from Dublin, Doyle had volunteered as an army chaplain, at the outbreak of the First World War. His commander claimed that Fr Doyle, who willingly shared the same risks as the ordinary soldiers, was one of the bravest men he knew. The conditions under which he ministered were described as, “A quagmire of blood, death and destruction, maimed bodies, and broken minds; yet within the mayhem, the light of faith and hope was sustained by chaplains like Doyle” *(Fr John Hogan, postulator).* Killed while administering the last sacraments, Fr Doyle’s hand, raised in blessing, was the hand of Christ, comforting bewildered and broken young soldiers dying in the mud of battlefield. Many regard him as a saint, and his cause for canonisation is presently being investigated.

Once asked what kind of Church he dreamt of, Pope Francis responded, “I see clearly that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful – I see the Church as a field hospital after battle”. This image, of course, comes straight from the scriptures, for example, in one of the Psalms we read that the Lord *“heals the broken-hearted, he binds up all their wounds” (Psalm 146:3).* The ministry of Jesus was one of binding up broken hearts and lives. Pope Francis frequently pointed out that, as God deals with us, so must we treat one another. The Church, therefore, has the specific purpose of bringing healing to a wounded humanity.

But, of course, the Church itself is, in itself, a “wounded healer”! Sadly, all too frequently, the Church has been forced to acknowledge, before the world, its own wounds, and that by its sometimes reluctance to do so, has often caused greater hurt to those already wounded. We have all witnessed this in the most excruciating manner in the sexual abuse scandals and their subsequent cover ups. Only when such wounds are honestly acknowledged can healing begin.

If we have truly celebrated the great feast of Easter, then we, as individuals, then as a parish community, and as a Church, will yearn to cry out with the apostle Thomas, *“My Lord and my God”.* But first we must look at the Lord’s wounds, even touch them as Thomas was invited to do, *“Put your finger here, here are my hands. Give me your hand, put it into my side”.* Jesus identifies himself with his wounds, they are proof that he is the crucified one risen from the dead.

The wounds on the risen body of Jesus are a sign of his victory – he has conquered death; he has defeated sin; he has accomplished his mission and manifested the power of love. His victory is his gift given to us in every Mass, as we take into our hands the Sacred Host, the Eucharistic sign of his wounded but risen body. He says to us, as he said to Thomas, *“give me your hand”,* and he touches our lives and pours his love upon us. Our hearts can do nothing other than cry out, *“My Lord and my God!”*

Looking upon the wounds of Jesus moves us not only to faith but also gives us the courage to acknowledge our own wounds. Our faith may be wounded by denial, as was Peter’s; it may be wounded by doubts, as was Thomas’; it may be wounded by fear, as was that of the other apostles. Our faith may bear the wounds of the various forms of sinful temptations, obsessions and neglects, but it is only by acknowledging those wounds do we find healing. Awareness of our wounds, and of our sinfulness, can open us up to regret and repentance, and to humbly accept the Lord’s healing forgiveness.

The gift which the risen Lord entrusts to his Church, the wounded healer, is that Sacrament of Peace we call Confession. In this sacrament, once again his hand is stretched out to us, ready and willing to lift us up – and fill us again with enthusiasm for what is good and true, right, and just. Confession is the Sacrament of resurrection – and a source of healing balm for wounded souls. A spirit self-righteousness, which creates a proud and closed nature, prevents the experience of such a healing grace.

Jesus said to the disciples, and says to you and me, *“As the Father sent me, so am I sending you”.* We have a mission, described by Pope Francis as, “at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people” (*EG 268).* He says that Jesus wants to make use of us to draw closer to his people; “the Lord wants us to touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others” *(EG 270)* – not just to look and forget, but to really enter into the reality of those suffering people of whom we hear day-after-day, so that we may know the power of tenderness. Then, like Fr Willie Doyle, we too, in our own particular situations, can sustain the light of faith and hope.

Pope Francis said that “The name of God is Mercy”. May apostles of mercy, such as Fr Willie Doyle, pray for us, and obtain for us tender and merciful hearts. Amen