One of the things that always strikes me on this Second Sunday of Easter is how the apostles are in a locked room, and yet Jesus still bursts in, and then He says “Peace” as the first word after the Resurrection to them, and then we see this transformation. And so it is with us if you think about it. We are locked in all kinds of things; anger, frustration, sadness, grief, and in this it might be hard to see God. But Jesus is there to burst in, and His love and mercy and do incredible things to transform a person.

Captain Mitsuo Fuchida would likely have been a footnote in World War II studies as he was an important officer in the Japanese Air Force. But today is remembered for much more than that; namely, for his love of God that transformed his heart.

He had risen through the ranks of the Japanese Naval Air Force while logging over 10,000 hours of flight time, mostly from the decks of Japanese aircraft carriers. He had gained extensive military service during Japan’s expansion into China. As a result, he was chosen to help plan and then to lead the air assault on Pearl Harbor.

At 06:00 hours, Captain Fuchida led the first wave of 183 attack aircraft towards Pearl Harbor. At 07:40 he opened his cockpit and fired a green flare into the air to let the other Japanese pilots know the attack was to proceed as planned. At 07:49, he ordered his pilot Lieutenant Mitsuo Matsuzaki to send the radio signal "Tora! Tora! Tora!" to flagship Akagi, informing them that the attack was commenced with total surprise; Tora was the acronym for, "torpedo attack" and in Japanese Tora means tiger. He remained over Pearl Harbor until the second wave of attack finished to see the extent of the damage to the US military installations. His plane was hit 21 times by anti-aircraft fire. It was amazing that his plane did not crash. Because of the success of the mission, he was granted an audience with Emperor Showa.

During the Battle of Midway, Capt. Fuchida was not able to participate because he had appendicitis. However, he did observe the progress of the battle from the carrier Akagi, and later he wrote a book entitled, *Midway: The Battle That Doomed Japan, the Japanese Navy's Story*. When the Akagi was hit by American aircraft, he had to evacuate the bridge by lowering himself down by a rope. An explosion then occurred, throwing him to the deck, breaking both ankles. He was rescued and later treated.

On August 5th, 1945, Fuchida was in Hiroshima attending a military conference when he was abruptly summoned to Tokyo. On August 6th, the US military dropped an atom bomb on the city. The following day, Fuchida was part of an assessment team who went to Hiroshima to survey the damage. All of the assessment team eventually died from radiation poisoning except for Fuchida.

Following the war, Gen. Douglas MacArthur summoned Fuchida to testify in Tokyo. He was disgusted with the idea of war trials and thought that everyone should know that war was war and that cruel acts occurred on both sides. He believed the Americans were certainly as cruel towards their captives as the Japanese were. However, he met his former flight engineer Kazuo Kanegasaki at Uraga Harbor who told him that he was treated well as a prisoner of war. Kanegasaki recounted that Peggy Covell, who cared for Japanese prisoners, had parents who had been missionaries and were captured by Japanese soldiers. In fact, before the soldiers took their lives, her parents asked for and were granted 30 minutes to pray for their executioners.

Peggy's parents were missionary teachers in Japan until 1939, when they departed for safety reasons to the Philippines and sent their children on to the United States. Eventually, the parents were captured by the Japanese and executed Sunday morning, December 19, 1943. Fuchida could not understand why they would pray to a God who could not save them from the sword. Why would the Covell parents pray for their enemies who would shortly take their lives? Why would Peggy return to Japan to assist with the Japanese POWs? She claimed, "Because Japanese soldiers killed my parents. ''Kanegasaki could not provide an answer for Fuchida. In Fuchida's moral framework, the duty of virtue required revenge to prove loyalty to a loved one whose honor had been disgraced. In Peggy's case Fuchida saw no rationale for Peggy's forgiveness or a higher obligation to love someone, especially an enemy.

In 1948 Fuchida was again ordered to testify. Near the Hachiko statute next to the Shibuya station in Tokyo, a Western man handed him a pamphlet entitled, *I Was A Prisoner In Japan.* It recounts the story of Jacob DeShazer who was one of General Doolittle's Raiders whose B-25 planes bombed Japan during 1942. Jacob DeShazer was the bombardier of B-25 No.16.

It departed from the deck of the carrier the USS Hornet and dropped its bombs over Nagoya, Japan. Because they wouldn't have enough fuel to return to the carrier, the plan was to fly to safety in China. A large, jagged hole in the plastic windshield created wind drag on the B-25, slowing it down. As a result, they ran out of fuel over Ningbo, China, and they had to parachute into this Japanese-controlled part of China. The Japanese captured them and DeShazer was in several POW camps for 40 months, 34 of the months were solitary confinement. He was beaten, malnourished and three of the crew were executed by a firing squad. A fourth member, Lt. Bob Meder, died of starvation.

During DeShazer's time in prison, as he saw the cruelty of his captors, he developed a deep hatred towards them. After approximately 25 months, he asked his guards for a copy of the Bible. He was allowed to have it for only 3 weeks. In the POW camp he read the Bible, and he accepted the message of salvation through Jesus Christ, and it changed his life completely. He began to learn Japanese and to treat his captors with respect. The guards responded positively. He resolved to someday bring the message of salvation to Japan. Ten days after the atomic bomb on

Hiroshima, American soldiers parachuted into the POW camp in Beijing, China, freeing him. DeShazer returned to the USA and attended Seattle Pacific College, now known as Seattle Pacific University. He returned to Japan to preach the gospel. Eventually, he established a church in Nagoya, the very city he had bombed years before.

The examples of Peggy Covell and Jacob DeShazer created a desire in Fuchida to know more about the Christian God.

The next time he was called to testify, Fuchida went to a Tokyo bookstore and bought a Bible. And all alone in the little farmhouse he began to read. There was much he did not understand. But what he did understand, as the weeks went by, was that there were not many gods, siding with this nation or that, but one God who loved all nations. This God had come to earth not as an emperor, or a military hero, but as a humble workingman. The more he read, the more Fuchida felt the horror of his past devotion - devotion to armaments, to war, to hatred of one race or another.

In an interview he gave in the 70s, he said “I came to the death of this carpenter, and read that He had prayed from the Cross, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’

“Why then … Jesus had prayed for me!”

He did not know any Christians, but he asked God to forgive him and became a Christian himself. And without knowing it, following the pattern of believers, he began to tell others. Told them he’d found the answer to despair and defeat. Told them God had not come to lead armies, but to lead men and women out of hatred into love.

Word of the conversion of the nation’s hero reached the media, and the torrent burst. Hate mail, abusive phone calls, threats to his wife and children. He had betrayed his country, turned to the foreigners ’God. Even old friends turned away from him on the street.

Others had done worse. A young ex-lieutenant, a flyer named Yamashita, had come to his home. He attempted to harm him and take his life, but after

a short conversation he, too, was changed by the power of mercy. That man lowered his knife and also became a Christian.

Mercy. Powerful stuff indeed. For while anger and hate have the power to change someone, Mercy is far more powerful. And this Second Sunday of Easter, also known as Divine Mercy Sunday, gives us a chance to reflect on the depth of God's love for us. Mercy can transform us and helps us to then transform others as his story goes to show you.

But how do we get there and help others to do the same?

It is "fear" we are told that causes the disciples to be locked. But through the power of God, that fear is dispelled.

"Peace be with you" are the first words of our Lord. He's not coming to settle the score about why they abandoned Him. Not coming to shame. Not coming to judge. But to give them peace. And there is the transformation. The disciples we are told rejoiced upon knowing it is the Lord.

As a starting point, it's so important to know how much we are loved by God. We can sometimes have shame. But Jesus invites us to turn it over to Him. In His appearance to Sister Faustina Kowalska, the Polish Saint, who had a vision of Christ that led to this feast being established. She wrote that Christ told her: "***Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet. My mercy is so great that no mind, be it of man or of angel, will be able to fathom it throughout all eternity."*** The image you may have seen of it illustrates that beautifully; we have it in front of the ambo today and in our narthex year-round. Jesus is always going to meet us right where we are at. We see that too in Thomas. Notice that although he is absent at first, when he is there the second time and says he will not believe until he sees the wounds and touches the side, there is no judgment on the part of Jesus. He does not scold Thomas or shame him; rather, as with the others, He meets Thomas where Thomas is at; it's as if He's saying, "OK I know you are skeptical and need some evidence, so let me show you." And so, Thomas touches the wounds and then makes that beautiful leap of faith. I love Thomas because he is so easy to relate to. Like him, we wander (as he was not present with the others, we can wonder from loved ones and from the Church), and like him sometimes we just need more proof. But because we still have faith in our hearts, even if

it's not as strong as it should be, God is still going to work with it. And whenever we come back, God is going to be there to welcome us with open arms. But, like Thomas, we also have to make a move towards our Lord. So first, I'd hope that you'd just daily ask yourselves where you are at in your faith life. Maybe you've fallen away, done not so good things, do things you don't tell people about or hide your secrets out of shame. Maybe you carry these things, be it your past or other anxieties over things in your life; and just need to turn them over to Jesus. Trust in His mercy. Let it set you free.

The second step though is to be merciful to others. We seek forgiveness, but in turn forgive others. And that too is what I love about Fuchida's story, of how mercy changed so many people in it. This is hard, but it's possible. Mercy is how our humanity is restored and how we can communicate Christ's goodness to others, as Fuchida's story goes to show you. What I love with it is how mercy spread; from the people he met who he was shocked could forgive, to what it did to the man who nearly took his life. We should not be naive and think this is easy; many of us myself included have a hard time forgetting wrongs done to us. But when we pray for God's help to forgive; when we think of Jesus saying "forgive them," or when we reach

out to those who have wronged us and even pray for those who have died who have wronged us, we can do so much towards changing two souls for the better, ours and the person with whom we are having a difficult time.

Third, being transformed by mercy we are sent. Captain Mitsuo wrote a book, became a Christian, and an evangelist. Thomas the apostle gets a bad reputation as the “doubter”, but he is understandably dejected so not with the others when Jesus appears, who see the wounds first too. Jesus tells Thomas to touch his hands and side and doubt no longer; he does and then has the bold proclamation of faith, “My Lord and my God.” But then he goes and proclaims the Gospel and becomes a martyr. Carolyn experienced liberation from mercy, but then went to school, became a national speaker and writer, and worked to be an agent of mercy in the world and make it known through words and action. When we forgive, when we are present to others, when we show kindness, we do the same thing.

You might see the words “Jesus, I trust in you” frequently on images of the vision that Sister Faustina saw of Jesus to convey divine mercy. That trust is so important. We need to trust that God loves us no matter what. That

His mercy is so powerful. The evil one, the devil, will do all he can to make us think we are unloved, or to give up on the world or ourselves. He rejoiced when Japanese and Americans hated one another, but mercy has done so much to transform that. God though created you and me, and He loves us more than we can ever imagine. When we admit our mistakes, seek forgiveness and forgive others in return, love can do so much to transform. So, when we get down on ourselves or others or the world, may our eyes be opened to the reality - the reality of sin as seen in the wounds, and the powerful reality of God taking those wounds on Himself through His love which is there to set us free. Wounds will always be there on our souls, and new ones will be created as our lives go on. But rather than cover them up, let us turn them over to our Lord knowing He truly will set us free and give us comfort and peace through His infinite love and mercy.