

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy), Year A**  
John Eaton

**Lectionary 43:**

[Acts 2:14, 42-47](#)

[Ps 118: 2-4, 13-15, 22-24](#)

[1 Pet 1:3-9](#)

[John 20: 19-31](#)

**Possible preaching theme 1:** The experience of awe and the formation of community.

**Possible scientific resources:**

- “The Science of Awe” by Summer Allen  
[https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/GGSC-JTF\\_White\\_Paper-Awe\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/GGSC-JTF_White_Paper-Awe_FINAL.pdf)
- “Eight Reasons Why Awe Makes Your Life Better” by Summer Allen  
[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/eight\\_reasons\\_why\\_awe\\_makes\\_your\\_life\\_better](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/eight_reasons_why_awe_makes_your_life_better)
- “The Emerging Science of Awe and Its Benefits” by Emma Stone  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/understanding-awe/201704/the-emerging-science-awe-and-its-benefits>
- “Why Scientists Say Experiencing Awe Can Help You Live Your Best Life” by Sarah DiGiulio  
<https://www.nbcnews.com/better/lifestyle/why-scientists-say-experiencing-awe-can-help-you-live-your-nca961826>

**Possible preaching theme 2:** Forgiveness as a source of emotional and spiritual health.

**Possible scientific resources:**

- “The Science of Forgiveness” by Everett L. Worthington, Jr.  
[https://www.templeton.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Forgiveness\\_final.pdf](https://www.templeton.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Forgiveness_final.pdf)
- “Forgiveness can improve mental and physical health” by Kirsten Weir  
<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2017/01/ce-corner>
- “Forgiveness: Your Health Depends on It” from Johns Hopkins Medicine  
<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/forgiveness-your-health-depends-on-it>
- “The Science Behind Forgiveness and How It Affects Our Mental Health” by David Puder  
<https://www.psychiatrypodcast.com/psychiatry-psychotherapy-podcast/2019/4/10/what-is-forgiveness>

**Homily outline on theme 1, focused on 2<sup>nd</sup> reading from Acts:**

They devoted themselves  
to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life,  
to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.  
Awe came upon everyone,  
and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.  
All who believed were together and had all things in common;  
they would sell their property and possessions  
and divide them among all according to each one's need.

- **The Nature of Awe**

- Awe is a reaction to an outside stimulus, and is ordinarily not self-generated
  - It moves us beyond self-focus
  - And helps us feel connected to something greater than ourselves.
- Studies by [Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt](#) highlight two characteristics of awe
  - First a “perceived vastness”
    - This may be a physical vastness such as the Grand Canyon or an unobstructed view of the sky at night
  - A second type may be a more theoretical sense of vastness
    - A vastness of depth rather than physical size
    - Examples from life could include,
      - Meeting someone of great prestige, e.g., the Pope
      - Watching a particularly gifted athlete or listening to a true musical virtuoso, which leaves us wondering “how did they do that?”
    - Examples from Scripture include
      - The apostles’ experience of the Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-9)
      - Paul’s encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9)
    - Examples from the liturgy
      - [Pope Francis](#) contends that awe and wonder at the beauty of Christian worship is essential
      - Today’s celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday invites us to awe and gratitude for the mercy of God revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
      - Such experiences of awe in the presence and mercy of God can invite deep gratitude and humility, as expressed in Kris Kristofferson’s moving [“Why me, Lord”](#)

- Recent studies indicate that [experiences of awe are ubiquitous](#) in daily life
  - Whether that is awe is inspired by a street musician
  - Individuals standing up to justice
  - Or autumn leaves cascading down from trees
- **The need for accommodation and adjustment in the face of awe**
  - Awe forces us to reevaluate our normal understanding of the world
    - Keltner and Haidt believe that the need for “[cognitive realignment](#)” is an essential part of the awe experience
  - Awe may lead to an experience of self-diminishment
    - It is not uncommon for people to “[feel small](#)” while looking at the expanse of the nighttime sky or some other monumental natural phenomenon
  - Awe may move people beyond focusing on themselves and encourage a greater sense of [connectedness to others](#)
    - Examples of this are the bonding experiences that take place
    - When an audience shares a particularly compelling theatrical performance
    - Or an exciting athletic contest
  - Multiple studies further suggest that experiencing awe makes people [more kind and generous](#)
    - Evolutionary scientists believe this is part of the reason over the course of human history that we have lived collectively
    - Awe makes us more likely to go along with what we need to do to maintain [social harmony](#)
- **Theological reflection**
  - Multiple sciences seem to verify the experiences of the early believing community and effects of those experiences as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles
    - The teaching and the actions of the apostles generated a sense of awe; the community was marked by obvious and unusual generosity and mutual care
    - That sense of awe was deeply rooted in the paschal mystery, that awe inspiring act of Divine Love, encompassing the death, resurrection, ascension of Jesus Christ and the imparting of his enduring spirit

- In today's culture, "awful" often means "bad" and the language of "awesome" is used so glibly that it has become the modern meaningless equivalent of "groovy" from the 1960s
- Awe may more readily be experienced by children who are seeing the world through new eyes
  - Not yet jaded by the adult syndrome of "been there, done that"
- But adults are not immune to awe—nor should we want to be
  - As the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins reminds us: "[The world is charged with the grandeur of God](#)"
- Jesus calls us to be child-like (Matt 18:3); and for those with child-like eyes and hearts, awe is an ongoing possibility
- In a world where so many are jaded and dreary, where so many are "weary and heavy-burdened" (Matt 11:28), God continues to call mystics and poets and ordinary folk like us to the experience of awe that scientists contend are all around us
- Perhaps, in time, that awe may help believers emulate the early Christian community marked by humility, generosity, and mutual care

**Tags:** awe, community, generosity, humility, psychology