

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Gospel: John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

REFLECTION 1:

AN EVOLVING CHURCH

Whenever there is an end-of-the-world prediction, you will always find people who believe it. They buy spare batteries for lamps and lay in supplies. But most of us are like Thomas, we are too smart to fall for things like that. So when news came that Jesus had risen from the dead, Thomas said he would not believe unless he could put his fingers into the wounds of Jesus' body. His doubt instantly fell away when he proved it for himself. Today's Gospel warns us that we may tend to identify with Thomas in our need to have absolute proof. Jesus reminds us: 'Blessed are those who have not seen and have yet believed' (John 20: 19-31).

At the heart of the Gospel stands the Risen Christ – the giver of the Spirit and the one who commissions the Churches' mission of peace and forgiveness. Karl Rahner, theologian to the 2nd Vatican Council, asked if we truly believed this and then proceeded to answer his own question; 'If you truly believe, then why are we so lax, joyless and resigned? Is Christ, or is he not, risen from the dead?' Rahner reminds us that Jesus did not rise and ascend to heaven until he had entered the utter depths of sin, death and loss and there in the ugly deprivation of human depravity, he has won victory! Jesus has not gone from us; he has actually come to be present in life for us forever, and this he does by the divine Spirit. He climbs into every human heart, filling us with a hunger for himself, for justice, love, truth and peace. He is with you, with me, in you and me. This Jesus celebrates in today's Gospel.

From this celebration, we are to go forth, despite fear, doubt and not seeing – guiding us to mission. Jesus' words of peace are not for us alone, but for every other person or group who hides behind closed doors and for all who have not heard or find it hard to believe that death is not the end. The Spirit will speak and move in us if we put off the paralysis of indifference and give ourselves over to its power. If the Spirit's words are only inscribed on a page, then the Spirit's power also remains sterile and untapped within us. What we are called to do today is make a deliberate act of the will that moves beyond words in order to bring these words to life in us, an act of the will that will transform a desperate needy world.

Finally, in today's excerpt from the Book of Revelations, the Seer tells us that while empires and emperors will come and go, in the end death will claim them all. Jesus says, 'I am the first and the last and the one who lives. Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever'. Our true leader is invincible. Our Lord and God, Jesus, who holds the keys of death, releases from death all who believe and remain faithful. This is our Easter faith. Jesus appears to everybody in a different way because each person is uniquely different. How does he appear to you?

REFLECTION 2:

WHAT IS DIVINE MERCY?

Easter's living legacy is beautifully told in today's Gospel (Jn. 20: 19-31) – peace, mercy, a dynamic Spirit, forgiveness and faith abound in today's readings. Jesus' greeting of peace (Shalom) takes on an added significance. Peace and joy and mercy were signs of the messianic era inaugurated by Jesus' triumph. He has fulfilled the prophecies and empowered his disciples.

With the wounds of his passion in evidence, the Risen Jesus announces the bond between his cross and his exultation, he is one and the same Lord. He commissions his disciples for their ministry of mercy and forgiveness, giving life to the community. On account of his conquest of sin, the risen Lord could share that victory with all who believe. His cross, the sign of contradiction imparts a message of forgiveness, power and peace.

'Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy' explains Pope Francis in his papal document, 'The name of God is mercy', when love encounters suffering, poverty, brokenness and sin, it mercifully takes action to do something about it. Mercy is love going out to misery, it is love poured out on sinful humanity, freeing us from sin and its consequences – mercy is love's second name.

The message of Divine Mercy is simple – it entails asking for God's mercy and urges us to be merciful towards others in our actions, words and prayers. He wants us to extend love and forgiveness towards others just as he does for us. 'I give you a new commandment' says Jesus, 'as I have loved you, so you must love one another' (Jn. 13,34) ... 'Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful' (Lk. 6:36).

The parables of the Good Samaritan, The Prodigal Son, the Rich Man and Lazarus and the Unforgiving Servant, all demonstrate the essential truth that having received mercy, we have an obligation to share it. Some great ways of exercising mercy are by performing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy – feeding the hungry, drink for the thirsty, clothing for the ragged, sheltering the homeless, comforting prisoners, visiting the sick and burying the dead. The spiritual ones are teaching the ignorant, praying for the living and the dead, counselling sinners and the doubtful, consoling the bereaved, bearing injustice patiently and forgiving wrongs willingly.