

Reflection for the 2nd Sunday of Easter

Sunday, 19th April 2020

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The church realises that it takes a long while for the truth of the resurrection to really sink in. If we believe that Jesus died, but then he rose again to conquer death, then life can never be the same again. Our big feast to celebrate this truth is Easter Sunday. Today concludes the Easter Octave: Eight days of special celebration. However, the Easter Season is a full seven weeks until Pentecost Sunday. And yes, we need this time for the implications of the truth of the resurrection to resound round our lives.

On the evening of Easter Sunday the disciples were gathered in the upper room – the same place Jesus had washed their feet and made the bread and wine into his body and blood. The doors and windows were locked and yet Jesus was able to come in and stand in their midst. We can imagine their alarm. Nearly always, when Jesus appeared to someone in the resurrection, his first words were: “Peace be with you!” His aim is to calm our anxiety.

It seems that the scars on his hands and his side were identifying characteristics. He shows them to the disciples, so that they can understand that it is truly the Lord risen. He senses that there is still unease in the room, so he breathes on them and gives them the Holy Spirit. He gives them power to forgive sins. This is why this Sunday is also called “Divine Mercy Sunday”. We celebrate the delegation of the power to forgive that Jesus now passes on to his disciples.

In the early decades of the church, Christians celebrated the forgiveness of sins in their baptism. The waters poured over the converts to the church washed away all past sins and made them perfect in the eyes of God. However, some of these converts went on to sin again. The gravest sin in the early Church was the sin of apostasy. Imagine a Christian being held by soldiers and asked if they believed in Jesus. Saying “yes” meant being thrown to the lions! Some did not have the courage they needed and would deny they were Christians. This reminds us of Peter in the courtyard denying that he ever knew Christ.

Later, the one who had sinned would come before the community and confess his fault. The first Christians interpreted the power to forgive sins as something vested in the whole community. If the whole community agreed, the community, acting in the place of God, would forgive the person and welcomed him back into the fold.

As time went on, it became more and more embarrassing to confess one's faults to the whole community. It was decided by the community to delegate this power to forgive to the priests and thus the sacrament of confession was born.

On this first Sunday when Jesus appeared to the disciples, Thomas was missing. The Gospel does not tell us why he was not there. When he hears that Jesus has appeared to the others he refuses to believe and lays down his criteria for proving that it was in fact Jesus who they had seen. However, 8 days later (that would be today) Jesus appears again only this time Thomas is with them. His obstinacy and arrogance melt away as Jesus invites him to verify that he is really there. Thomas makes a perfect act of faith: “My Lord and my God”.

The Gospel has much to say to us today as we live through the current lockdown. Inevitably, when a family is living on top of each other twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, tensions will arise and there will be arguments and disagreements. Families need to find new mechanisms whereby they can forgive each other. A question we can ask as a family is how we manage to live tolerance and let the past be the past.

We can easily imagine that the disciples became bored as they waited for the Lord. In lockdown we need to find out how we can use our time creatively. We can't demand to see the Lord, but we can patiently wait for him until he is ready to reveal himself to us. Let us support each other in our prayers.