

Homily-SecondSundayEaster08

To understand today's Gospel we have to reflect on the context of the reading. The disciples have left Jesus at the lowest point of his life. Peter has denied knowing Jesus and Judas has betrayed Jesus. The love of Jesus for his disciples has remained constant toward his disciples. The disciples who so easily turned away from Jesus now hide behind closed doors as they are afraid that what happened to Jesus will also happen to them. In the midst of their fear Jesus enters the room in his glorified body. The love that Jesus had toward his disciples before his death continues after his death. The Gospel reminds us that Jesus would love his disciples to the end. Now the disciples are able to imitate this same self-giving love in their own lives.

In the midst of their fear Jesus comes through the doors and offers them his peace. Knowing their fear and their need of peace the Lord Jesus appears to them and offers them his peace. It is significant that Jesus knows the fear of the disciples and enters the room to give the disciples peace.

This encounter reminds us that just as the risen Lord knew the fears and cared about the fears of the frail disciples so that risen Lord knows our fears and cares about our fears, frustrations and trials. The risen Lord meets us as we are and speaks a message of reassurance in the midst of our worst difficulties. The encounter between the disciples and the risen Lord reminds us as well that even after the resurrection the risen Lord continued to be with the disciples and in the same way the risen Lord continues to be with us. We may not see the glorified body of the Lord but we are called to have faith that the Lord is with us each day.

The disciples hide behind locked doors which shows their lack of faith in the risen Lord. Their fear paralyzes them from proclaiming the Good News which they know and have experienced. They have been with Jesus through his passion and death. Mary Magdalene has brought them the good news of the resurrection and yet they still hide behind locked doors. The response of the Lord is to give the disciples peace and to show the disciples his hands and side in order to dispel their fear and to instill faith in the frail disciples.

Not only does the risen Christ meet the disciples in their need but he breathes the Holy Spirit upon them so that they may share the Good News of the risen Christ with others. Just as the Father sent Jesus so Jesus sends the disciples. Jesus gives the Spirit to the disciples so that they will be to the world what he was to the world. The disciples who have been with Jesus will continue the presence of Jesus to a later generation. They are to bring joy and peace of the risen Jesus to later generations of frightened disciples. The gift of the Spirit will render the absent Jesus present within the community in its worship and in its life.

After giving the gift of the Spirit Jesus gives the disciples the power to forgive sins. The church has the power to forgive sins. This was true in the sacrament of baptism and continued to be true in the forgiveness of those who committed mortal sin and finally has continued to be true since the fifth century through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Today the church celebrates “Divine Mercy Sunday.” On this day we remember that God is a God of Mercy. This Feast reminds us that Jesus accomplished his passion in order to bring us mercy and forgiveness to us and to the whole world. Divine Mercy Sunday reminds us of the importance of repentance for the sins we commit and the times we do not live the loving lives to which we are called.

Thomas walks into a community that rejoicing in the peace that they have experienced through the risen Christ. Thomas indicates to the disciples that he will not believe that Jesus has risen unless he experiences the risen Christ on his own terms. Thomas must be able to touch the wounds of Jesus before he will believe.

Eight days later, on the day of the Lord, Thomas is again in the room. Jesus shows the group his hands and side. At this time Thomas has faith without having to touch the hands and side of Jesus. As a result of his experience of the Lord, Thomas gives us the highest confession of Jesus’ identity in the New Testament when he cries out, “My Lord and My God.” At the end of the story, the risen Lord praises disciples who have not seen and yet believed. We like disciples for the past two thousand years, are the disciples who have not seen and yet have believed. The story reminds us that the risen Christ is a part of our lives through the sacraments, the Scriptures and worship. We are blessed because Christ is with us and we are called to have faith in his presence even if we do not see Him with our eyes.

Let us now turn to our first reading. Throughout the Sundays of Easter Season our first reading will be taken from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. To set the context for the first reading, Peter has just told the people of Jerusalem the truth of salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ. Peter has called the people to conversion and faith. The reading says that 3,000 people turned to the Lord. Immediately after presenting the message of Peter, Luke gives us a unique window into the life of the Christian community shortly after the death of Jesus. The portrayal gives us a picture of the Easter Faith of the early Christians. As we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of our parish and look ahead to the future of our parish, I believe it is valuable to reflect on the life of the early church.

The reading tells us that the early church praised God in worship and had a community life that was characterized by exaltation and sincerity of heart. Is this the way our community would be described if we were to be described by an outsider. Our reading from Acts shows us what Easter Faith looks like. We are to live out this same Easter Faith in our community life.

Central to Luke's Gospel is the way people gathered around the prophet and accept the visitation of the prophet. Now in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles the people in Jerusalem have a choice to accept or reject the visitation of the Lord through his apostles.

The inner life of the community consists of a) devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles, b) fellowship, c) the Breaking of the Bread and d) prayers. Just as the early Christians devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles so we are called to grow in faith. The parish puts a priority on offering solid opportunities for growth in faith. This upcoming semester we will have two teachers visit our parish to teach about Spirituality and Social Justice. I invite you to attend these classes. Do we spend any time in spiritual reading or reading which will assist us in the growth of our faith?

The second characteristic that is listed concerning the early church community is fellowship. The example given to describe the fellowship of the early community is the sharing of goods with members of the community that had little. This action shows that in the early church fellowship was based on compassion that the members had for one another. Do we share that same compassion for one another? As we reflect on the fellowship of the early church community we should ask ourselves how welcoming are we as a church community. If a stranger was to come to our church how hospitable would we be? In the same way we often don't know members of our church community who attend the same Mass that we attend. Do we ever go out of our way to get to know others within our community that we have never met?

The reading says the early Christians broke bread together in their homes and that they celebrated the Breaking of the Bread together. Again we are called to reflect on our own sense of community and unity. Do we spend time getting to know members of our church community? Do we celebrate Mass as a community that is brought closer together through our participation in the Eucharist?

The reading says that the people gathered together in the Temple to pray. The early Christians still considered themselves Jewish and so they worshiped together in the Jewish Temple. The reading speaks about the early Christians praising God in the Temple. Would our worship be described as praising God? Are we rather silent observers during the Mass?

The reading refers to the signs and wonders of the apostles. Did the signs and wonders end with the early church or possibly were they only for the apostles? This section of the reading challenges us to have faith in our prayer and to be a people who pray with those in physical and material need. This section of the reading challenges us to make prayer a part of our lives and to believe that God will work through our prayer.

I once again wonder, "If an outsider were to describe our community, what would he write?" Fortunately community life is not static. We as individuals and as a community continue to change. Let us continue to develop into a community which grows in faith, which cares about one another, which participates in the liturgy and praises God when we worship and in our lives.