

Second Sunday of Easter April 03, 2016 (Divine Mercy Sunday)

Acts 5:12-16; Revelation 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19; John 20:19-31

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the very heart of Christianity. St. Paul tells us that if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is our faith. For the disciples the Resurrection of Jesus was a unique divine experience. They were not able to comprehend the fact of Resurrection and grasp the deep inner meaning of it. However it built up their faith particularly because of their experience of the presence of Jesus and made them persons, courageous and ready to face any eventuality for their master. After his resurrection Jesus stood among them, talked to them ate with them and taught them the doctrine. They are now called upon to build the faith of others and we see how marvellous the living faith of the early Church was. The baptized Christians once they knew that Jesus was the Messiah and that He had resurrected from the dead, became totally transformed persons. They were ready to face any suffering and even death as it was Christ that was important. Once Jesus had resurrected by the grace of God the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit, it did not take Him long to firmly establish the Mystical Body the Church as the continuation of his mission on earth. Resurrection became the uniting factor, building the mystical body of Christ.

In the first Reading we have Luke's account of the Apostles and their witness to Jesus which proclaims that the Apostles are ready to carry forward the work of Jesus Christ. They continue the healing ministry of the master as they work signs and wonders in his name. Furthermore they do it in the place where Jesus himself had worked, in the area around the Jerusalem Temple. Immediately after the resurrection of Jesus, they became persons totally transformed. People in Jerusalem too once they saw their work held them in high esteem. The result of their work was that the community increased in numbers. People also believed in the power of the Apostles and brought the sick and infirm so that they could touch them or even their shadow fall on them. While several were healed many more joined them in the community. It seems they found courage to do the works of Jesus through the impetus of the Holy Spirit. The initiative in the Acts always belongs to the Spirit of God. The strong faith of the people

was evident in their conviction that even the shadow of Peter is enough to heal the sick and free those bound by unclean spirits.

The inspired words given in the second reading of today are intended to inspire us with still greater love and gratitude to the Risen saviour, who has earned for us a new life of glory and happiness beyond the grave, provided we remain faithful to our Christian faith during our earthly life. This reading taken from the Book of Revelation speaks of the visions of John who comes as the consoler to the suffering church of Jerusalem. Here the author tells the community that Jesus will ultimately conquer all universes and come out victorious. He shares with them his pains and sufferings as one who has experienced them. He now gives them the symbolic description of Christ in glory. He is the one who is resurrected and will be there forever. The reading tells us that the glorified Jesus will appear on the Lord's Day. He is "like the Son of man" as revealed in the Book of Daniel. Several titles are given to him such as the priest, a king, and the head of the church, risen from the dead and equal to God. He comes to assure the faithful that he is King of creation, Lord of history and the conqueror of the world. Jesus has mastered death not only for his own human nature but for all human persons. Human death is only a temporary state and Christ has won eternal life to all.

Today's gospel begins with the first action of Jesus after his resurrection as he appears to his disciples. The setting is very important here. There in an atmosphere of surprise, fear and wonder, unable to see and visualize the presence of Jesus as he suddenly appears before them. It was Easter Sunday, two days after the death of Jesus. The disciples were inside the house, with the doors firmly locked, because they were terrified that, as companions of Jesus, they too would be liable to arrest and punishment. The words of assurance that had been given to them earlier were all forgotten. Their fear was suddenly shattered by the unexpected appearance of Jesus in their midst. The very fact that he could be present in spite of the locked doors indicated that he was not the same person as they had encountered earlier but he was present to them in a new way. He calmed their fear with the immediate gift of peace. "Peace with you!" was his first greeting. It was the normal Jewish greeting of "Shalom". But, coming from Jesus, the Prince of Peace, to this group of frightened people,

it had special meaning. And, in the Greek, there is no verb so it can be taken either as a wish or a statement of fact indicating that where Jesus is truly present to us, there is peace. To establish continuity between the earthly Jesus and the risen Lord, he showed them his hands and his side. He was not just a disembodied ghost but the same Jesus who died on the cross – and yet there were the differences. The disciples' fear was gradually transformed into an unspeakable joy at the return of their Master.

The second action of Jesus was the commissioning of the disciples through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus continued to speak to them and teach them as he did at the Last Supper. Repeating his greeting of peace, he proceeded to give them their mission. He commissioned the disciples to continue the same work in the world that Jesus had been doing. There was no critical word of any sort regarding their failure to stand by him during his final moments. Jesus empowered the disciples to carry on his mission by breathing on them the Holy Spirit. In a sense this is the new creation, similar to that what God did at the first creation. The breath of life, reminiscent of God breathing on the dust of the earth and creating human life in the first man or as Prophet Ezekiel says in the parable of the valley of dry bones. With this new creation he was sending them out just as the Father had sent him on a mission. For them this mission was an essential part of their discipleship. Now on they are called upon to live like Jesus and draw others to share their personal experience of knowing and loving Jesus and being loved by him. An aspect of the gift of the Holy Spirit was the power of the disciples to forgive sins. In John, sin refers primarily to blindness to the revelations of God in Jesus. The disciples were to continue the struggles of Jesus to overcome this blindness by showing the world the true light of salvation. He told them: "For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained." Their mission was to be his messengers to forgive and reconcile and fulfil the task of the Kingdom of God. Their task is to bring about the reconciliation of all with their God, with their brothers and sisters and with the whole of creation. They are called upon to build a new family. The result of it is in the Acts, they were of one mind and one heart.

The final event in this passage centres on the encounter of Thomas with the Lord. This is in reality a story of faith. When Jesus appeared to the

disciples for the first time on the Easter Sunday evening, only ten disciples were present. One of the disciples, Thomas, was not present among them on this occasion. The reason of his absence is not important. What is important is his encounter with the Risen Jesus. When they narrated the appearance of Jesus he refused to believe that the Lord was raised from the dead and had visited them. He wanted to see with his own eyes some irrefutable proof of his presence. Thomas personally wanted to encounter Jesus in order to believe in his resurrection. For his refusal to believe Thomas is often accused as a doubter. It is right that we ask the question at this juncture, whether Thomas was really a doubtful person or whether the other disciples were the persons who lacked faith. At the outset it seems as if Thomas was really a man of true faith. When they told him that Jesus had risen and had appeared to them he was surprised that they could still remain in hiding. He felt if they had really seen Jesus they would have been really shouting at the top of the voice telling the world that Jesus is living. Since they are hiding and were still scared of the Jews, he could not believe he had risen from the dead. He was a courageous person and at the death of Lazarus, had openly said let us go with Jesus and die with him. In reality he was the man of faith. In his life he did just that. He went too far away India and died for his faith.

Thomas needed the real proof of the wounds nails on his hands and feet and the wound in Jesus' side to believe in the Risen Lord. The disciples knowing Thomas very well as a man of determination, leave him alone. They did not make any attempt to correct him. They left him alone to search for himself the truth about Jesus. During next appearance Jesus gave them all the gift of peace. Then he called Thomas forward to him and showed himself. The reaction of Thomas was the expression of the words of Faith which we repeat so often, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus called Thomas and asked him to believe in him. Ironically, too, it is an act of faith not merely for Thomas but for us all. It was not Thomas who was doubtful and without faith. But Jesus accepted Thomas just as he accepted others. He was not the one to linger on their failures. He accepted Thomas and his faith and added something more: "Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe." These words of Jesus indeed apply to us. We have not seen Jesus and yet have believed. Jesus accepts our faith as he did of Thomas. Finally, we are reminded that everything that is in the Gospel is to help us to come to that stage of faith by which we believe "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" who shares his life with us.

We find three ideas in today's gospel: Spirit to Mission, Seeing to Believing and Not Seeing to Believing. First Jesus gives them Peace, not like the world gives but his own peace. Then he gives them the gift of the Spirit, which coming from the Father and who will teach them everything, and remind them of what Jesus had said. Then he breathes on them and gives them the mission to forgive and love and build the church. Second we have Thomas who saw and he believed. Jesus offers Thomas his very presence to see but what is significant is that Thomas confesses "My Lord and my God" apparently without placing his hands into Jesus' side. His faith is complete and total. Then the final stage it continues to those of us, those hundreds of thousands who have not seen Jesus and yet believed in him. This has been our faith of not seeing and yet believing. We are all included in such a standard and we have the faith in the risen Lord.

Today is Divine Mercy Sunday, the Second Sunday of the Easter season. It was named by Pope John Paul II at the canonization of St. Maria Faustina on April 30, 2000, and then officially decreed by the Vatican. Divine Mercy Sunday can be seen as the convergence of all the mysteries and graces of Holy Week and Easter Week. The feast focuses the light of the Risen Christ into a radiant beam of merciful love and grace for the whole world. In his revelations to St. Faustina Jesus expressed His desire to celebrate this special feast. He says that the Feast of Mercy emerged from his very depths of tenderness and mankind will not have peace until it turns to the Fount of his Mercy. Jesus says that the divine floodgates through which grace flow are opened and let no soul fear to draw near to him, even though his sins be as scarlet because the Feast of Mercy emerged from the very depths of his tenderness.

We go back to the Gospel of today. It was eight days after Easter: it is the octave of the Resurrection. Today is Divine Mercy Sunday. Thomas is the sign of this divine mercy, which is unequalled, immense, overflowing, and unspeakable. Thomas saw the Lord and he needed to see him to believe in his resurrection. We, today, in the year 2013 have not seen the risen Jesus, and yet we believe in him. In any event, Jesus is in Heaven: we have no choice but to believe without seeing. Yet Thomas is the sign of the

mercy of God which makes us similar to him. This is because we can see the Lord Jesus without seeing him. This looks like a paradox. What enable us to see the Lord are our baptism and our Eucharist. We see him as one who out of Mercy has risen for us. We become like Paul who had not seen the Lord and at Damascus could believe him. Let us thank the Lord for his infinite mercy! Let us thank Him for our baptism, which allows us to see him already, thanks to the virtues that this sacrament brings us: faith, hope, and charity! Faith remains, and until the end, it will remain our everyday companion. But in the end, there will remain only love! For, in the beginning, love was already present that powerful and irresistible Love of god in his people.

Word spread across the countryside about the wise Holy Man who lived in a small house atop the mountain. A man from the village decided to make the long and difficult journey to visit him. When he arrived at the house, he saw an old servant inside who greeting him at the door. "I would like to see the wise Holy Man," he said to the servant. The servant smiled and led him inside. As they walked through the house, the man from the village looked eagerly around the house, anticipating his encounter with the Holy Man. Before he knew it, he had been led to the back door and escorted outside. He stopped and turned to the servant, "But I want to see the Holy Man!" "You already have," said the old man. "Everyone you may meet in life, even if they appear plain and insignificant... see each of them as a wise Holy Man. If you do this, then whatever problem you brought here today will be solved."

While driving her brand new car, Anita took a wrong turn at a crossing and rammed into a stationary truck. Completely shaken, she approached the trucker who looked on in shock, and apologized for the damages. She said she would show him her registration papers for the necessary legal action. As she was talking to the man, her mind suddenly flashed the image of her husband Daniel. She felt every part of her body shaking. The car had been on the road for barely a fortnight. How could she face Danny now? Wouldn't he flare up and justifiably so, when she confessed that it was all her fault that their newly acquired prized possession was ruined? She had to literally struggle to open the car door. With trembling hand she reached for the glove compartment to get the documents. As the lid popped open, a

slip of paper fell out. She decided it was not anything important, but on an impulse she picked it up and unfolded it. There was something written in her husband's distinctive hand. Curious, she screwed her eyes to find out what it contained. The moment she read the note, her trembling ceased, her tears evaporated. She breathed a sigh of relief and even managed a slight smile. The note read: "If you ever get into an accident, darling, do remember that it's you I love and not the car. Yours affectionately, Danny"

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