



2nd Sunday of Easter



Date: Sunday, April 23, 2017 | **Season:** Easter | **Year:** A

First Reading: Acts 2:42–47

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 118:2–4, 13–15, 22–24 | **Response:** Psalm 118:1

Second Reading: 1 Peter 1:3–9

Gospel Acclamation: John 20:29

Gospel Reading: John 20:19–31

Preached at: the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

So in this evening's Gospel we hear the familiar story of the Risen Christ appearing to the disciples in the Upper Room.

I've just come back from a retreat with all the Parish Catechists where we watched the movie, Risen, which starred Ralph Joseph Fiennes as the Roman Tribune responsible for the crucifixion on behalf of Pilate and who, in the movie, is also present in the Upper Room and sees the Risen Christ for himself. In turn he believes. If you haven't seen it I recommend it. But it reminds me of the interplay between doubt and faith, gift and gratitude which we see in today's Gospel. But one of the disciples is missing, Thomas, from whom we get the famous expression 'doubting Thomas'. Jesus doesn't just leave Thomas out, rather we're told he re-appears the following week, and invites Thomas to touch his wounds and his side, so that he might believe.

What is going on here? Let's remember that all the disciples abandoned Jesus before his death, and now they've gathered and they feel terrible for that, but at the same time confused because they hear his body has been taken, and then he's appeared to some others – but not themselves... In this evening's Gospel, Jesus appears to them and reassures them, tells them to forgive and sends them on their way joyful again. This should not be surprising. I think that the Risen Christ is continuing the mission he started. For a few weeks before Easter we heard the stories – perhaps it's better to think of them as testimonies – of various healings by Jesus.

Similarly, in this Easter Season, we hear in the first readings tales of how the apostles are now doing similar bold work – healing others in the name of Jesus. We have seen Jesus heal the blind, raise the dead, comfort the widows and forgive the sinful. Jesus was constantly going out – especially to the poor, the vulnerable, the forgotten, the hurting... all those who needed to hear His message.

We can also observe how the Risen Christ has met each of his disciples.

In today's Gospel, the Risen Christ continues to heal – in this case, he wants to heal Thomas of his doubt, he wants to give the gift of faith that he craves. On Easter morning, he gently called Mary Magdalene by name; and at the Breakfast by the Sea, he forgave Peter three times for the three times he denied him. And it is forgiveness that is the very first thing Jesus asks the disciples to do. We read in the Gospel that He breathed the Holy Spirit onto them and sent them, telling them to forgive sins. To spread the Good News but not in an impersonal way – but in a way that allows heart to speak to heart.

What we see here is that God speaks to us in similarly personal ways, knowing what we need, desiring nothing more than to let us hear, and see, and believe, forgiving us and propelling us towards fullness of life.

But I think there is something else going on. Notice how Jesus invites Thomas to touch his wounds. This is not just, I think, to offer proof – but to share his wounds with Thomas. Jesus is the original 'wounded healer'. Perhaps there are some of us here tonight who have friends who struggle with addictions or personal problems and yet in their despair and desperation they are able to help others in similar situations because they understand. Sometimes it takes someone who is wounded to help another wounded person.

Jesus bore his wounds for each of us, for our sins, for our struggles, for our pain and imperfections. He is the person we can turn to who will understand. He does not judge but rather patiently listens and says 'Peace be with you', 'Go and forgive sins and proclaim the good news'.

So we see in this scene Thomas touching the body of Christ, with him seeing where his side was pierced and where his heart was exposed. We can remember in a special way that today is Divine Mercy Sunday. This is a relatively new de-

votion, but I believe it is a ‘re-incarnation’ if you will, or a re-appearance under a new name of a more ancient pious devotion in the Church, that of devotion to the Sacred Heart.

I’m sure many of us might remember our grandmothers or parents having these photographs of the Sacred Heart – or indeed of the Divine Mercy. God’s divine mercy is always available in the Sacrament of Reconciliation – which is the institutionalized form that the Church has given effect to Jesus’ request that we forgive sins, but it is also present in the healing words of Jesus in the Scripture, and in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Mercy is not something that God has, but rather what God is. You see, Mercy and Love are related, just as the Divine Mercy and the Sacred Heart are related. How are they related? Mercy is the shape that love takes when confronted by a sinner. So if God is Love, then when he looks at each of us with our sins, then, God is Mercy too. When we ask and receive God’s mercy, for he never refuses it, we in a way receive part of God’s very self. This is why we believe that the Eucharist is, as Pope Francis says, medicine for the sick, not a prize for the perfect. In receiving the sacraments today, let us boldly approach confessing our sins to God and desiring to receive the mercy he so badly wants to give us. And this is why he invites Thomas to touch him – so that he might have the faith he most sorely desires. But in touching him, Jesus is allowing Thomas to see that he is not alone in feeling wounded. Jesus shares his vulnerability with us, so that we might share our vulnerabilities with Him. And we all have weaknesses we wish we didn’t have, or wounds we try to hide.

Let us pray today that we might have the courage to talk to Jesus about what most bothers us. In our prayer, let us approach Jesus and see his wounds too. Last week we meditated on Christ’s death, and on his wounds borne for our sake, let us now – joyful with the news of the resurrection, approach him and share our wounds and disappointments with Him and ask him to heal them for us. Thomas of course, more than being the Doubting Thomas, is the Wounded Thomas and is the first to exclaim ‘My Lord, My God’. In encountering each other’s wounds, Thomas recognizes Jesus’ divinity and his faith is restored.

Let us remember Jesus’ words to us: “Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe.”

Let us thank God for our belief.

Let us beg God to strengthen our faith, and bless us with hope so that we might live a life of love and mercy.

Amen.

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