

**Second Sunday of Easter – Year A  
(Apr. 27, 2014)**

**Peace Be with You**

If I were to ask you how you experience Easter in your life today, I wonder what you would answer. Do we ever give much thought to this all important question: how do we enter into the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus right here and now in our every-day lives?

Our three readings today tell us something about the resurrection experience of some of the early Christians, whether it's those fearful disciples in the upper room, or doubting Thomas, or that early Christian community that we heard about in the first reading as they come together to pray, to share the Eucharist, and to see to the needs of the weaker members of the community.

That passage is one of my favorites from the Acts of the Apostles. It tells us something that should be taken for granted in our own Christian lives and that is that our prayer and worship cannot be separated from our life together in Christian community, and what is an essential part of that life, caring for one another, especially those in need.

But today I would like to look more closely at the Gospel passage. Picture the scene as John the Evangelist tells the story. The disciples are locked in because they are afraid. They are discouraged, despairing, ready to cut and run when the coast is clear like the two on the road to Emmaus. Suddenly Jesus is in their midst. What must have been their reaction? More fear at what might have been a ghost? Consternation at suddenly being confronted by someone they were sure was dead? Shame when they recalled that they had deserted him just at the moment he needed them the most? Think of Peter recalling his denial, recalling the look in Jesus' eyes as he passed by him in the courtyard of the high priest just as he was swearing he did not know him.

But what is the first thing Jesus says to them? "Peace. Peace. It's all right. Don't be afraid." The presence of the risen Jesus brings peace in the midst of turmoil, of confusion, of despair, and of fear. Then he says, "Receive the Holy Spirit," and he breathes on them like God the Father

breathing on Adam at the dawn of creation. They are the new Adam, the new creation, the first witnesses to the world of who he is and what he came to do. He says, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." It's a missioning. He missions them to the same mission the Father had given him. "Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven. Whose sins you shall retain they are retained." What is the mission? It's reconciliation. It's forgiveness. I can't imagine there is anything they are not to forgive. And that, of course, was the mission of Jesus. To bring the love, compassion, forgiveness of a good and gracious God to our world, and in that way effect the salvation of the world. Jesus did that in his life, death, and resurrection. The disciples experienced their own death, and resurrection: the death of despair and the life that Jesus gave them with the Spirit, and they now bring that life to others. We see them doing it symbolically in the Acts of the Apostles as they bring healing and wholeness to sick and hurting people.

But there is more to the Gospel passage. There is the story of doubting Thomas, Thomas who was not there and who would not believe unless he could see and touch the wounds of Jesus. And then, the story tells us, Jesus is there. Once again he says, "Peace." And once again there is consternation. But this time in only one person, Thomas. The scene is wonderful. Jesus calls him forward and tells him, "Put your finger in the wounds in my hand. Place your hand in my side." And just as wonderful is the meaning behind it all. Thomas cannot really experience the resurrection of Jesus until he has literally entered into the wounds of Jesus. And I think that one brief but powerful scene tells us as much about how we too experience the Paschal mystery as anything else in the Gospels or the letters of Paul. Dear friends, we are the Body of Christ, and that Body is still wounded, is still suffering, and is still dying, and it is only by entering willingly into that same suffering, that same woundedness, that same dying, that we also enter the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Another way of putting it perhaps is by accepting fully who it is that God has meant us to be: loving, compassionate, and understanding human beings.

During these past months, perhaps many of us have felt like those disciples gathered in the upper room: disillusioned, discouraged, fearful

because of the state of the economy, wars that do not seem to end, to say nothing of a political campaign that does not seem to want to end, scandals in the Church. This year some of us have had a more than usually vivid experience of the dying part of the Paschal mystery. We are now celebrating the rising part: first of all the resurrection of Jesus, the pledge and promise of our own resurrection. As we gather here in prayer and worship, listening to ancient stories of the presence of the risen Lord, we pray that we, too, like those disciples, may be filled with hope in the knowledge that in spite of everything, God loves us and is still with us, that we, too, like doubting Thomas may be able to enter into the hurts and wounds of the body of Christ today and to say, "My Lord and my God" and like those early Christians we heard about in the first reading go forth from this place filled with the love of God, willing to share that love wherever we are and with whomever we meet. And that's when we will really experience the resurrection of Jesus.

It's almost impossible to speak today without mentioning our two newest saints, John XXIII and John Paul II. Actually they both fit in very nicely with what we have been considering. Jesus sends his apostles out to be reconcilers. This was a great desire of both these popes. John XXIII called the second Vatican Council which brought bishops from all over the world together to ponder the future of the church. It was the first truly universal council, the first truly ecumenical council. Protestant, Orthodox, and non-Christian observers were invited and had opportunities outside the regular sessions to have in-put to the discussions. John Paul reached out to non-Catholic and non-Christian churches. We see it in his apologies to the Jews, to women, to the Orthodox, for the harm that the Catholic Church caused them through the ages. I remember at the time of his death watching an extraordinary program on TV talking about his contact with the Muslim community. A number of Muslims were interviewed saying only positive things about him and how he had helped to improve relations between Catholics and Muslims. There was a segment in a mosque where the people were praying for his recovery.

There are those who will recall that his pontificate was not without controversy. Many people reacted negatively to certain things he said and did. But as the outpouring of love and sympathy at the time of his death

demonstrated the world will remember him far more for the positive accomplishments of his time in the chair of Peter. Both of these men, John XXIII and John Paul II, each in his own way, was a blessing to the Church and we thank God for them.