

## SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER: DIVINE MERCY B/2006

Our God is a living God, a God who gives life and lets it prosper in each one of those who belong to him. He has flourished that life in his beloved Jesus Christ by raising him from the dead. In the 1st reading, the apostles bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus, as we heard, with courage and joy. Their testimony is powerful because it is done not only with bravery, but also without fear and regardless of insults and threats on their own life. Only one thing counted for them, namely to proclaim to anyone, who could listen to them, that Jesus Christ is risen, he is alive.

The apostles' testimony to Jesus' resurrection was not only given in words and speech, but also in creating a strong new life-style of community. They were united "heart and mind" with one another of those who gave their life to Christ by sharing their material possessions. A community founded on such principles of brotherhood and communion, "so different from those commonly accepted, could not go unnoticed", and in fact, great favor was accorded to them all.

Why did the apostles strive to stress such a style of life? One of the reasons is that, the risen Christ being invisible, they wanted to prove to the world that he is alive by giving them insights and impetus, calling them to build up a new society founded on the values of God's kingdom. In other words, it is only when we are able to form a community inspired by love, generosity and selflessness that we are able to prove that the Spirit of the risen Christ is among us. Otherwise, it becomes very difficult and even misleading to pretend being touched by Christ's resurrection while our life is far from being in accordance with his Spirit. In fact, how can we convince people that Christ is risen, and witness to our faith, without the evidence of concrete love, reciprocal aid and brotherliness?

This statement shows clearly that Jesus' resurrection needs to be testified by our deeds of faith rather than scientific arguments; it belongs to the realm of living testimony and not of scientific proof. That is the problem today's Gospel is highlighting through the doubt of Thomas. As a matter of fact, when Jesus appeared to the disciples while he was not there, Thomas can hardly believe it. He even hardened his position in saying that unless he sees the mark of nails in Jesus' hands, puts his fingers in them and his hand into his side, he will not believe.

The reproach of Jesus to Thomas: "do not be unbelieving, but believe", is an indication that faith is, first of all, a matter of trust in God's word and not of proof. Faith can never be founded on what one sees. The resurrection can never be proved scientifically. As the French writer Anthony of St Exupery has put it rightly in his small and wonderful book "The Little Prince": What is essential is invisible to the eyes; one sees well only with the heart. How can we have those eyes of heart? This is the challenge of Christian life. If one wants to see, verify and touch God's mysteries, he goes nowhere. We can approach God's mysteries only with our heart. So sound Jesus' words fitted: "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed"

The risen Lord now has a life which cannot be detected by our senses, a life that cannot be touched by our hands or seen with our eyes; it can only be the object of our faith. This is true today as it was also in the time of the Apostles in spite of their privilege of having a unique experience of the Resurrection of Christ. Those who believe without

seeing are blessed, because their faith is more genuine, more pure; it is more than knowledge. It is a trust that does not need to be proved by external proofs. One who sees has the certainty, not the faith; he has an irrefutable proof, and therefore, does not really need faith. If the proofs were important, then all the peoples who have seen Jesus' miracles would believe in him, and yet not everybody did.

If there is any convincing proof about Jesus, as a historical figure and the risen Lord, it is the existence of the Gospel itself. That is what John tries to tell us when he says "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name". Here is the only proof given to anybody looking for reasons to believe, that is the Gospel. That is where we find the word of Christ and what he has done, that is where his person is most clearly pictured and not in the Davinci Code. There is no proof beside the Gospel word. Outside the Gospel, everything else is just fiction and human invention.

What does the risen Christ bring us? The first gift Christ brings us is his peace. There is none valuable thing someone can wish for himself than the peace of heart. Jesus knows that we live in a troubled world, where we are confronted with many problems and difficulties. Like the disciples, at times, our projects of life have been broken and our dreams turned into nightmares. Jesus comes to assure that he is with us by bringing us his peace.

The second gift of the risen Lord is the Holy Spirit. This is the strength without which there is no way of pleasing God. For without his Spirit we cannot call God "Abba" or bear witness to the Gospel. The transformation we see in the disciples after the resurrection of Jesus comes precisely from the Holy Spirit they have received from Jesus. This Holy Spirit is the foundation of the sacrament of reconciliation. In the sacrament of reconciliation Christ operates through the power of the Holy Spirit in the consecrated ministers to bring forgiveness to the world. That is why before giving to the apostles the power to forgive and retain sins, Jesus says: "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained".

This second Sunday of Easter we are celebrating the Divine mercy. This feast instituted by Pope J. Paul the 2nd in 2000 based on the writings of Polish nun St Faustina Kowalska brings forth the reality that God is merciful toward us. He wants to forgive our sins. He expects the faithful to be merciful in turn and to turn to him in trust and repentance. When God forgives our sins, he manifests the power of his love. He alone can create in us a pure heart and, indeed, he does, for he wants everybody might be saved. He is tender and merciful, slow to anger and full of love. Our renovation in the Holy Spirit is an invitation to live like Christ, totally given in love of God and of our brothers and sisters. Letting us be guided by the Holy Spirit, we ask God to transform us in the image of our beloved savior, the risen Christ. May God bless you all!



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