

Divine Mercy Sunday (2nd after Easter) B/2009

On the emblem motto of USA it is written, “E Pluribus Unum”, which can be translated Out of many, we are one. This motto can also mean that when people come together as one, in spite of their diversity and different backgrounds, they are strong and capable of making things happen. This is true in social life as it is in married life. Most of the couples, for instance, who survive are those who strive to stay together in hard times and moments of crisis. Likewise, the survival of faith follows the same process. Christianity is a religion of togetherness, of people gathering together around the person of Jesus and his word.

That is what the apostles have understood from the beginning of the Church, as the witness of the Acts of the Apostles attests. All the disciples were united with one another in a communal life. They devoted their life to the teachings of the Apostles, to the breaking of the bread, and to the prayers. In fact, the teaching of the apostles, which is the continuation of Jesus’ teaching, the Eucharist and prayer, are the pillars on which the life of the Church is founded. That was true in the time of the Apostles as it is today.

Whenever the Church forgets to put the Gospel at the center of its life, it will end up by telling its members stories rather than to nourish them with the word of life. Whenever the Eucharist is not the center of the life of the community, the Church will starve its members and deprive them of the food of life that lasts forever. Whenever the Church stops praying, it loses its strength and its members go directly to their perdition. That is why, listening to the word of Jesus, reception of the Eucharist, and permanent contact with the Lord through prayer are also a duty we have to perform in order to keep our faith alive.

The word of Jesus, the Eucharist and prayer, give to the Church its full meaning as a community of believers. Where they are not taken seriously, the Church becomes like any other gathering, or an association of friends. But it also means that without Jesus, there is no Church at all. That is why when Jesus commissioned the disciples, he said, “As the Father sent me, so I send you”. In that sense, it means that those who are sent need Jesus’ message, his authority, and his presence, so that in hardships they turn back to him and enjoy his assistance through the power of the Holy Spirit.

For that reason, the Holy Spirit plays a big role in the life of the Church. He inspires within the Church different charismas so that its members may put them at the service of their brothers and sisters, and for the growth of the word. The Holy Spirit sustains the Church in its prayer so that it may be done in the spirit of Jesus. And it is the Holy Spirit who guides the Church in the celebration of the Eucharist and any activity offered in the name of Jesus. The Spirit is the one who testifies, and the Spirit is truth.

All that helps us understand why the first gift the risen Christ gives to his disciples is the Holy Spirit. Where the Holy Spirit reigns, there reigns peace. Jesus wants peace to reign in the midst of his disciples through the power of his Spirit. Then, he can say, “Peace be with you”. What Jesus wishes for his disciples is not just social peace, but especially the peace of heart that nobody can have if we are not reconciled with our brothers and sisters, and with ourselves.

In fact, we live in a world in which all kinds of violence threaten our unity of mind and heart. Our effort to live together as disciples of Jesus beyond racial and cultural backgrounds is often dominated by unspoken discriminatory feelings and sentiments. Our desire for peace often fails because of hatred and the spirit of vengeance we maintain.

We continually feel that we need peace of heart; we need to reconcile and to forgive one another, as well we want to be forgiven for things we have done, and for which we are not proud of. Plus, because of the weakness of our human nature, we easily break God's commandments and our commitments.

It is in that sense we have to understand the importance of the sacrament of reconciliation Jesus gives to his apostles in today's Gospel. First of all, by giving an order to his disciples to forgive sins, Jesus institutes the sacrament of confession. He gives to the apostles a ministry to be exercised in his name for the good of the whole Church. Furthermore, by giving this sacrament, Jesus comes to the rescue of our sinfulness and human weakness so that we count on God's mercy. Without God's forgiveness in the sacrament of confession, we are lost. That is the reason Jesus gives this sacrament so that we reconcile with our God, with one another and with ourselves.

The deep understanding of the sacrament of confession requires that we turn in faith to Jesus who is behind any action happening in the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. Without faith we cannot adequately approach Jesus and how he operates in this sacrament. Faith is not believing without proof, but trusting without reservation. Proof deals with material things; while trust belongs to the order of confidence. If the proofs were important, then all the people who have seen Jesus' miracles would have believed in him, and yet not everybody did. Trust is justified only on the basis of the conviction that I am not wrong by trusting the word of the testimony given to me by Scriptures. As St John says, Jesus did many other signs that are not written. But these are written so that you believe and may have eternal life.

That is what is lacking in Thomas in today's Gospel. He wants to see before believing. He does not trust the testimony of his friends who told him they have seen the risen Lord. For Thomas, faith should be proven by facts in order to be credible. The testimony given by his friends does not have the value of truth unless he experiences the truth himself. And yet, the resurrection of Jesus, which is the foundation of our faith, does not belong to the realm of proof, as people do with scientific facts. It has to be approached and accepted in faith and trust that God, who is faithful to himself, could not leave Jesus in the tomb forever.

That is why 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 in the witness of those who have been his followers from the beginning. Faith can never be based on what one sees, but in the acceptance of the testimony of the first eyewitnesses of his life, death and resurrection. We need that faith today more than ever. Let us open our hearts to the gift of faith. Let us come before the Lord with trust and ask him to forgive us our sins in the sacrament of confession. This Sunday of the Divine Mercy reminds us that Jesus loves us and wants to forgive us our sins. Let us not miss such an opportunity to make peace with him and our brothers and sisters. May God bless you all!

Acts of the Apostles 4, 32-35; 1 John 5, 1-6; John 20, 19-31



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