

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter: Divine Mercy A/2011

After the resurrection of Jesus, the life of the disciples was completely changed. The presence of the crucified Lord in their midst gave them courage and strength to bear witness to the resurrection. They were so strengthened by the presence of the risen Christ that, not only their faith became bold, but also their way of living became a true witness to the teaching of Jesus.

That is exactly what we see in the first reading of the Acts of the Apostles. In fact, the disciples were united with one another in a communal life. They were diligent to the teachings of the Apostles, the breaking of the bread and prayers. Not only they, but also all those who joined the Church, were determined to live together, to share their possessions and their meals in the praise of God and the approval of the people.

Four realities were at the center of the life of the early community, namely the unity of heart and mind, the teaching of the word, the Eucharistic bread and prayer. These four elements are the pillars which give to the Church its real meaning as the community of believers. Wherever these four realities are not taken seriously, I am afraid that the Church will finish in division and dislocation.

That is why, whenever the Church forgets to put the Gospel at the center of its life, it ends up by telling its members tales, instead of nourishing them with the word of life. Whenever the Eucharist is not the center of the life of the community, the Church starves its members by depriving them of the food of life. Whenever the Church stops focusing on prayer, it ends up by pushing forward programs that are unhealthy to the growth of the community. Whenever the members of the Church stop listening to one another, they end up in quarrels and disputes that will harm the life of the community.

This is true not only for the Church as a community, but also for each one of its members in particular. That is why, to listen to one another and to strive for unity, to convert to the word of Jesus as the center of our life, to receive regularly the Eucharist and to pray together, is a duty we have to perform in order to keep our faith alive and the community vibrant. Otherwise, we will be facing misery as a community.

If that is the case, how can we avoid such a pitfall for the Church? The only way to avoid such a misadventure is to follow the guidance of the Spirit of Jesus. I believe it is for that reason that the first gift the risen Lord gave to the disciples was the Holy Spirit. In fact, it is the Holy Spirit that pushes the Church to look for unity, to listen to the word of Jesus, to live by the Eucharist and to be assiduous in prayer.

Wherever the Holy Spirit is, there reigns peace. It is Jesus' deep desire that we live in peace and have peace through the power of his Spirit. The peace Jesus is talking about is not only social peace, but also the peace of heart which is impossible if we are not reconciled with ourselves, with our fellows and with God.

Among many factors which prevent us to be at peace, we can single out, for instance, the discrimination toward those who are not like us; the tacit spirit of vengeance and hatred

we maintain toward those who have wronged us; the lack of sincere forgiveness, etc. All these things are an expression of the sin that is in our hearts and in our lives. Unless we get rid of this spiritual cancer and convert to the Spirit of Jesus, we will never have peace.

All that helps us understand why in today's Gospel Jesus gives authority to his apostles to forgive sins. By doing so, Jesus institutes the sacrament of confession, so vital for the purification of the Church and our inner peace. By doing so, Jesus gives to the apostles a ministry of reconciliation to be exercised on his behalf for the good of the whole Church.

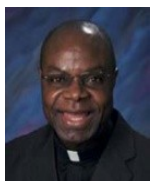
However, in order to better understand the functioning of this sacrament, as well as of all the sacraments in general, we need strong faith. That is what St Peter would like to stimulate in us in the second reading. He wants us to come to the understanding that faith is believing without proof and trusting without reservation. Not that faith is contrary to arguments or proof. The problem is that, in its nature, faith reposes above all on the confidence we have to give to Jesus and his word. After all, proof deals with material things; while trust belongs to the order of confidence. 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.

That type of faith is exactly what Thomas was lacking. In fact, Thomas wanted to see *de visu* Jesus and have the proof of his resurrection before believing it possible. He did not trust the testimony of his friends who told him that they have seen the risen Christ. In other words, for Thomas, faith should be proven by facts in order to be credible and acceptable. That is the reason why he did not believe the testimony the other apostles gave him.

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 from within, 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.

We need that type of faith today more than ever. In this Sunday of Divine Mercy, let us come before the Lord, who is merciful and compassionate, with the assurance of faith that when we confess our sins, he forgives us. Let us ask him to give us the courage to recognize our sins and to reconcile with him and with our brothers and sisters. May God bless you all in this Easter season with the gifts of his Holy Spirit for your growth and the growth of our Church!

**Acts 2, 42-47; 1 Peter 1, 3-9; John 20, 19-31**



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