

Second Sunday of Easter B/2012

This second Sunday of Easter is the Sunday of Divine Mercy. The readings of this Sunday continue, in many aspects, the joy of the resurrection. They describe in particular the life of the first community in the aftermath of the resurrection of Jesus. They equally attest to the comforting presence of the risen Christ in the midst of his disciples and the many gifts he has given them in order to strengthen the Church.

The first reading of the Acts of the Apostles bears witness to the truth of the resurrection by showing how the life of the disciples was transformed by the risen Lord. It shows that all the disciples were of one heart and one mind by leading a life of true community and brotherhood.

Because of that style of life, they put everything together so that there was no one in need that the community did not care for. Even those who had properties and possessions sold them and brought the dividends to the apostles who distributed to each according to need.

What is behind this text is the idea that the resurrection of Jesus changed the life style of the first disciples. Another idea is the truth that the witness of the disciples to the resurrection was not only in words, but also in acts and deeds. That is why the community life took precedence over individual life so that the disciples felt themselves as one body and witnesses of the presence of the Lord in their midst.

All that helps us understand the stakes of today's Gospel as it relates the apparition of Jesus in the midst of the disciples. First of all, the Gospel says that, as the doors of the place where the disciples were hiding were locked, Jesus came and stood in their midst.

Once he was there, he wished them peace and showed them his hands and his side so that there was no doubt that it was he. After that, he commissioned them, as he was also sent by the Father. He gave them the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sins in his name.

The Gospel says also that Thomas, one of the twelve, who was not there on that day of Jesus' apparition, could not accept the witness of his colleagues until Jesus appeared again a week later. At the sight of Jesus, Thomas was so confused that he could not do what he planned to do. In the end, Jesus reproached him for his unbelief and invited him to believe without seeing.

The Gospel ends up in telling us that Jesus had performed many deeds which are not written in the book. It mentions also the main reason why some of his deeds are written so that we come to believe and have eternal life in his name.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? The first thing we learn is about the mission of the Church. In fact, when Jesus says to the disciples that "as the Father has sent me, so I send you", he is establishing the mission of the Church. This mission is not only important, but it also defines the reason of the existence of the Church. In that perspective, the Church exists in order to bring people to salvation. That is why it has to teach the message of the risen Lord so that by accepting it people may come to receive eternal life.

Anytime the Church forgets this message and sets its priorities in caring for other things than salvation, it fails in its mission. In this mission, the Church has a guaranty that it will succeed because of the presence of the Holy Spirit received from Jesus. Moreover, the sending out of the disciples is parallel to the sending out of Jesus himself by the Father. In that sense, the Church is faithful to the mission in so far as it is obedient to Jesus, as Jesus himself was obedient to the Father.

A second thing we learn is about the importance of the sacrament of confession. In the Gospel, Jesus says to the apostles: "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained". By these words, he establishes the sacrament of reconciliation.

In this sacrament Jesus operates through the power of the Holy Spirit in the consecrated ministers in order to forgive sins. In that sense, Jesus comes to the rescue of our sinfulness and human weakness so that we count on God's mercy. Without God's mercy, indeed, we cannot be saved (Ps 130). Because God forgives us our sins, we have to open our hearts and forgive also our fellows.

The last thing I want to highlight is about the importance of believing without seeing. To Thomas, who did not believe in the testimony of his colleagues, Jesus said, "Do not be unbelieving, but believe. Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed".

By this statement, Jesus shows us that faith belongs to the domain of trust and testimony and not that of proof. If proof was sufficient, those who saw the miracles of Jesus would have believed in him. And yet, they did not. That is why faith can never be based on what one sees, but on the acceptance of the testimony of the scriptures.

In that sense, we understand the reproach of Jesus to Thomas. The problem of Thomas, indeed, is that of many others who think that because they do not see, they cannot believe. They doubt God's existence and his presence in the world, because they forget that what is essential is not always visible to the eyes. As the French writer Anthony of St Exupery rightly states in his small book "The Little Prince": What is essential is invisible to the eyes; one sees well only with the heart.

The challenge our world is facing today is that of acquiring the eyes of the heart in order to see with the heart. Anyone who wants to see God's facts with his eyes, or touch them with his hands, is going nowhere. We can approach God's mysteries only with our heart. So fulfilling are the words of Jesus: "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed"

Let us pray, then, for the gift of faith. In this Sunday of the Divine Mercy, let us ask the Lord Jesus to forgive us our sins and allow us to forgive one another. Let us pray also for peace in the world, in our hearts and in our families. May God bless you all!

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



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