

Second Sunday of Easter C/2013

The readings of this second Sunday of Easter talk about the consequences of the resurrection of Jesus on the community of the apostles and his apparition in their midst. They invite us to trust the Lord Jesus who is alive in the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The first reading of the Acts of the Apostles talks about the life of the early Church in the aftermath of the resurrection of Jesus. It shows that many signs were accomplished through the hands of the apostles and all stayed together by leading a life of prayer. Because of the quality of their life, the apostles drew a great number of people to them and those who were sick and possessed with unclean spirits were healed.

What is behind this text is the idea that the presence of the risen Lord has consolidated the unity and the sense of community of the early Church. Another idea is the truth that, thanks to the living presence of Jesus in their midst, the apostles were able to perform signs and wonders in favor of the sick and the possessed.

This text allows us to understand today's Gospel as Jesus appears to his apostles and gives them the power to forgive sins. First of all, the Gospel says that the doors of the place where the disciples were hiding were locked. Suddenly, Jesus appeared in their midst with all the marks of his crucifixion and, two times, he wished them peace.

The disciples were really happy to see him again. He, then, commissioned them and bestowed the Holy Spirit on them as well as the power to forgive sins in his name. Unfortunately, one of them named Thomas was not there that day. When he was told about Jesus' apparition, he did not believe unless, he said, he could see the mark of the nails in his hands and put his fingers in his side.

After a week, while Thomas was with the group, Jesus appeared again while the doors were locked and wished them peace. He, then, addressed Thomas by inviting him to do what he planned and to put his fingers in his side. Confused and ashamed, Thomas could not do it. At that reaction, Jesus told him that those who believe without having seen are blessed.

Finally, the Gospel ends by telling us that Jesus accomplished many signs which are not written down in the book. But those written are given to us so that we come to believe that Jesus is the Christ and the son of God, and by believing we have eternal life in his name.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The only point I want to bring is the importance of trust. I call trust the placement of confidence in something as true or in someone as truthful. In that sense, the problem of trust is at the heart of our life as individuals and society. Without a minimum of trust, life becomes impossible, because we will be suspicious toward one another. This is true for life in society as well as for the life of faith.

In fact, Christian faith is, above all, trust in God. And when we say that we believe in God, we say nothing else than that we trust in God. Such trust is not based on some empirical proof we have about God, but rather on the testimony of those who have been with Jesus from his beginning until his last day. It is that testimony the apostles have

transmitted to us so that by believing it, we may have eternal life. That is the reason why Jesus says that “Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed”.

All that makes clear why Jesus reproaches Thomas for his doubt: “Do not be unbelieving, but believe”. In fact, what Jesus wants to tell him is that he should have trusted the testimony of his friends who told him that he was alive. After all, faith cannot be based on what one sees. The French writer Anthony of St Exupery reminds us that “What is essential is invisible to the eyes; one sees well only with the heart.” Perhaps, the problem we face today as a society is that of giving eyes to our hearts so that we may see beyond our human senses.

Anyway, why cannot we demand proof before believing? Because proof does not generate faith in someone; on the contrary trust does. For instance, at the time of Jesus, many people had seen his miracles, but only a few people believed in him. For those who did not trust him, they said that it was through the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that he was performing the miracles. That is why what is important is not to “see” or “touch”, as Thomas was suggesting, but rather the interior attitude of openness of heart that allows God to touch us and dwell in us.

The sacrament of confession we practice in the Church operates on that register of trust. The more we trust Jesus and his word, the easier the confession will appear to us. The more we are hesitating and doubtful about the relevance of Jesus’ words, the more difficult the confession will be.

Of course, I am not minimizing the psychological difficulties some have with this sacrament. I am also not playing down the fear some have to open up to a priest, because they think that it will destroy the image he has about them. In the same way, I am not minimizing the hurt and the grievance some still have following the priests’ scandal.

What I want to say is that the sacrament of confession is above all a work of the Holy Spirit who operates within it in order to bring peace to the brokenhearted and purification to the souls. That there had been failure in the Church, that is true. But, it does not destroy the value of the sacrament as left to us by Jesus himself. In fact, Jesus would not have left us this sacrament, if it were not important. It is here we have to make a distinction between our emotion and the need of accountability before God. If we take Jesus’ words seriously, we have to take the sacrament of confession seriously. That is why it is more important to care about what God thinks of us than about what people think of us, even if it is a priest,. In my own experience, I do not always remember what people say in the confession, once it is done.

Let us pray that on this Sunday of divine mercy, Jesus may help us to be aware of his presence in the sacrament. May he heal us in body and soul! May God bless you all!

Acts 5: 12-16; Revelation 1: 9-11a, 12-13, 17-19; John 20: 19-31



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