

Second Sunday of Easter B/2015

The readings of this second Sunday of Easter continue to spread the joy of the resurrection of Jesus. They describe in particular the effects of the resurrection on the first community of the disciples and Jesus' apparitions to the apostles. They invite us to trust the testimony that the eye witnesses of the resurrection give us, as well as the invisible presence of Jesus among us through the sacrament of reconciliation.

The first reading of the Acts of the Apostles recalls the truth of the resurrection by showing the transformation it brought to the community of the first believers. It highlights especially the community of life that characterized the first disciples and the many gifts they received as they lived out the Gospel.

What is behind this text is the idea that the resurrection of Jesus changed the life style of the disciples. There is also the idea that the witness of the disciples was not a matter of words, but rather of acts and deeds. The last idea we have is that the resurrection of Jesus compelled the disciples to give priority to the life of community over individual interests.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel. First of all, the Gospel starts with the apparition of Jesus to the twelve while the doors of the place where they were hiding were locked. Then, it accounts for the joy of the disciples when they saw Jesus. It accounts also for the peace Jesus gave them and the power to forgive sins.

After that, the Gospel relates the story of Thomas, who was not present at the moment of the apparition, and how he failed to believe his friends when they talked to him about Jesus' resurrection.

The Gospel ends up by mentioning the second apparition of Jesus while Thomas was there and the shame he had for having doubted the reality of the resurrection.

Finally, the Gospel says that Jesus did many other miracles which are not accounted for in the Gospel. It says also that those given in the Gospel are so that we believe that Jesus is the son of God and, by believing in his name, we may have eternal life.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today I want to talk about Believing without Seeing. In the experience of daily life, there are a lot of things we are used to seeing, touching or hearing. The fact of seeing, touching or hearing creates a human impression that reassures us about what we have seen, touched or heard. The corporal touch or the physical sight, in turn, reassures us that those things really exist. In that sense, we have a material proof that the things exist because we have touched them with our own hands or seen them with our own eyes.

However, there are also a lot of things we cannot touch with our hands or see with our eyes, like love, beauty, music, knowledge, etc. The fact of not touching or seeing those things does not mean that they do not exist. It means only that they belong to a register other than what we usually use for touching or seeing things. That is why when a woman or a man tells one another: "I love you", they trust what the other says.

Sometimes, in order to show how serious they are, they offer flowers or exchange a kiss. In any case, flowers or a kiss cannot be considered as the proof of love, because the

reality they live in their hearts is bigger than the flowers or the kiss. Flowers and a kiss are too little and too small to translate the intensity of love that is in their hearts.

As it can appear, we are completely out of the domain of the touchable or the seeable. Here, we enter the register of sensing and feeling. To put it bluntly, we enter the register of trust.

This example clarifies the whole stake of today's Gospel. Faith, indeed, does not belong to the domain of seeing or touching; but, rather, to that of trust. It is a trust in the testimony of those who have been with Jesus from his beginning until the day he ascended into heaven. Because it belongs to the domain of trust, faith has no need of proof. That is why Jesus tells Thomas that 'Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed'.

If material proof was sufficient, the people of the time of Jesus who saw his miracles would have believed in him. And yet, they did not. That is why we have to understand that faith can never be based on what one sees or touches, but rather on the acceptance of the testimony of the scriptures that have come to us. Faith takes shape on the ground of trust in God and the scriptures. Faith is trust turned into action.

It is that trust which operates in the sacrament of reconciliation. In the sacrament of reconciliation, indeed, Jesus forgives us our sins through the mediation of the established minister who is the priest. The priest is not acting on his behalf to give people absolution of their sins. On the contrary, he acts on behalf of Jesus according to the words from today's Gospel: "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained". Most people who have a problem with the sacrament of reconciliation are among those who have a problem with trust.

If faith is trust, then, we do not need external proof to support it. If there is really a proof about Jesus we can count on, it is the very existence of the Gospel itself. In fact, though written by different peoples, who have different personalities, all the four writers of the Gospel come to the same conclusion and truth, namely that Jesus is our savior and the redeemer of the world. That is why today's Gospel ends with those words: "Jesus did many 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 through this belief you may have life in his name".

Let us pray and ask God to give us the gift of faith. Let us ask him to help us transform our knowledge of him into trust in him. On this Sunday of Divine Mercy, Jesus reminds us that he loves us and wants to forgive us our sins. Let us open ourselves to the gift of his forgiveness through the sacrament of confession. Let us ask him for the courage to forgive one another, because he forgives us too. May God bless you all!

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



Homily Date: April 12, 2015
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Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20150412homily.pdf