

Second Sunday of Easter A/2017

The Readings of this second Sunday of Easter talk about the growth of the Christian community. They show us the qualities that build the Church as the community of believers and witnesses of the Risen Lord. They invite us to renew our faith in the Risen Lord and to trust his presence in our midst through the power of the Holy Spirit and the sacraments.

The first reading of the Acts of the Apostles describes the aftermath of the resurrection of Jesus. It shows how the disciples devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles, the sharing of life together, the perseverance in prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist. It shows also how God operated signs among them and increased the community with new members, while the disciples, praising God for it, were appreciated by all people.

What is behind this text is the idea that the presence of the risen Christ has given courage and strength to the disciples in order to bear witness to Jesus before the world. Another idea is the affirmation of the transforming power of the resurrection that affects people, their way of being and their action.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as it relates the apparition of Jesus in the aftermath of his resurrection. First of all, the Gospel explains how, although the doors of the place where the disciples were hiding were locked, Jesus appeared to them and wished them peace.

Then it indicates how in order to reassure them, Jesus showed them the wounds in his hands and side, and how the disciples were very happy to see him again. It also gives an account of the giving of the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sins in the name of Jesus.

The Gospel equally reports the incident related to the absence of Thomas among his colleagues when Jesus appeared for the first time. It shows how at that time Thomas refused to believe by arguing that unless he could see with his own eyes and touch the scars of Jesus with his own hands, he would not believe.

Then, the Gospel reports a second apparition of Jesus while Thomas was present. It shows that at that moment, Jesus invited Thomas to put his fingers in his scars as he intended, but the latter, confused, could not do it.

After that, the Gospel gives an account of the reproach of Jesus to Thomas by declaring that blessed are those who believe without seeing. The Gospel finishes by mentioning the fact that Jesus did many other signs which are not written. Finally, it declares that some things are written so that by reading them people may come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and have eternal life.

What do we learn from today's readings? Today I want to talk about Faith and doubt. In fact, each one of us has doubted at least once in his life. When we doubt, we call into question situations or what we hear from people because we are less convinced. The doubt in this way has nothing wrong with it. It is normal as part of the human process of evaluating things in order to establish the truth or the credibility of what is told us.

However, when doubt comes against the evident testimony of eye' witnesses, it is a kind of lack of trust. And yet, life and human relationships are fundamentally built on trust. On a daily basis, we count and depend on one another about a lot of things, knowing that if we do not do so, life becomes impossible. Think of marriage, the school or the banking system. If we do not trust those institutions, society will scramble.

In order to trust, indeed, we do not need a prior proof, but rather a deliberate openness toward the other, a belief that he is trustworthy. We need a minimum degree of confidence without which we create a kingdom of suspicion around us.

This evocation helps us understand why Jesus tells Thomas "Do not be unbelieving, but believe". Or again, "blessed are those who have not seen and have believed". In that perspective, it is clear that what Thomas wanted was a proof of the resurrection and what he was lacking was trust. Proof, indeed, deals with material things, while trust belongs to the order of confidence.

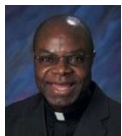
For Thomas, faith should be proven by facts in order to be credible. The testimony given by his friends did not have the value of truth unless he experienced it himself. And yet, the resurrection of Jesus, which is the foundation of our faith, does not belong to the realm of proof, as people do with scientific facts. It has to be approached in faith and trust that God, who is faithful to himself, could not leave Jesus in the tomb forever.

Jesus' reproach to Thomas 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 with Jesus from the beginning. Faith can never be based on what one sees, but in the acceptance of the testimony of the first eyewitnesses of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

We need that trust in order to understand how Jesus gives life in any sacrament through the power of the Holy Spirit. Without that, we will always have a problem with the sacrament of reconciliation, because we will look at the ministers and not at the Holy Spirit who makes the forgiveness effective.

On 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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