

Second Sunday of Easter B2024 (Divine mercy Sunday)

Let me start this homily by referring to the motto of the USA that reads, "E Pluribus Unum" [Out of many, one]. One of the ways of understanding this motto is that when people come together as one, in spite of their diversities and differences, they are strong. That is true in the life of society, but it is also true for the life of faith.

We see the illustration of that truth in this Sunday after Easter. When Jesus was arrested and crucified, the disciples run away; they went in hiding and were dispersed. Even Peter who was following at distance ended up by denying Jesus. But, once Jesus rose from the dead, they all came back together and bore a powerful witness to our Lord's resurrection.

Today's first reading shows how the disciples were united with one another, in heart and mind. They lived a communal life by putting their possessions together to the point that there was no a needy among them. Their unity was such that those having private properties sold them and brought the proceeds to the apostles to distribute to the less fortunate.

That change in the life of the apostle was caused by the resurrection of our Lord. Because of the resurrection, the community life took precedence over individual life. They all felt that they were one body. Today, some charismatic groups, like one I saw in Germany, try to live together as it was in the early Church. Each member works outside of the community, but they come together in evening for prayer and meal. At the end of the month, each brings his salary in the community that takes care of the needs of all.

For sure, to come to such a lifestyle requires a strong faith in the risen Lord. Without Jesus, there is no church at all. That is why when Jesus commissioned the disciples, he said, "As the Father sent me, so I send you". Those who are sent need Jesus' message, his authority, and his presence, so that in difficult times they draw from him strength and courage to keep going through the power of the Holy Spirit.

For that reason, the Holy Spirit plays a big role in the life of the Church as the one who inspires charismata and gifts to be put at the service of the growth of the word. The Holy Spirit sustains the Church in its prayer so that it may be done in the spirit of Jesus. He guides the Church in the celebration of the Eucharist and any activity offered in the name of our Lord.

All that helps us understand why the first gift the risen Christ gives to his disciples is the Holy Spirit. Where the Holy Spirit reigns, there reigns peace. Jesus wants peace to reign in our midst through the power of his Spirit. Then, he can say, "Peace be with you". What Jesus wishes is not just social peace, but especially the peace of heart that nobody can have if we are not reconciled with our brothers and sisters, and with ourselves.

We live in a world in which all kinds of violence threaten our unity of mind and heart. Our effort to live together as disciples of Jesus is often dominated by unspoken prejudices and discriminatory feelings. Our desire for peace sometimes fails because of hatred and the spirit of vengeance we maintain.

We continually feel that we need the peace of heart; we need to reconcile and to forgive one another. We also want to be forgiven for things we have done to others and of which

we are not proud. We easily break God's commandments and our commitments toward him because of the weakness of our human nature.

In that context, the sacrament of reconciliation that Jesus gives to his apostles in today's Gospel becomes very important. By giving an order to his disciples to forgive sins, our Lord institutes the sacrament of confession. He gives to the apostles a ministry to be exercised in his name for the good of the whole Church. Furthermore, by giving this sacrament, our Lord comes to the rescue of our sinfulness and human weakness so that we count on God's mercy. Without God's forgiveness in the sacrament of confession, we are lost. That is the reason why our Lord gives this sacrament so that we reconcile with our God, with one another and with ourselves.

The deep understanding of the sacrament of confession requires that we turn in faith to our Lord who is behind any action of the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. Without faith we cannot adequately approach Jesus and how he operates in this sacrament. Faith is not believing without proof, but trusting without reservation. Proof deals with material things; while trust belongs to the order of confidence. If the proof was important, all the people who have seen our Lord's miracles would have believed in him. And yet not everybody did. Trust is justified on the basis of the conviction that I am not wrong by trusting the word of the testimony given to me by Scriptures. As St John says, Jesus did many other signs that are not written. But these are written so that you believe and may have eternal life.

That is what is lacking in Thomas in today's Gospel. He wants to see before believing. He does not trust the testimony of his friends who told him they have seen the risen Lord. For Thomas, faith should be proven by facts in order to be credible. The testimony given by his friends does not have the value of truth unless he experiences the truth himself. And yet, the resurrection of our Lord, 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 and accepted 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. Faith can never be based on what one sees, but in the acceptance of the testimony of the first eyewitnesses of his life, death and resurrection. We need that faith today more than ever. Let us open our hearts to the gift of faith. Let us come before the Lord with trust and ask him to forgive us our sins in the sacrament of confession.

This Sunday of the Divine Mercy reminds us that Jesus loves us and wants to forgive us our sins. Let us not miss such an opportunity to make peace with him and our brothers and sisters.

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



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