

## **Second Sunday of Easter C/2016**

The readings of this second Sunday of Easter talk about the impact of Jesus' resurrection on the community of the apostles and his apparitions 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 describes the life of the early Church in the aftermath of the resurrection. It shows how many signs were accomplished through the hands of the apostles and how they stayed together by leading a life of prayer. It shows also how they drew many people to them and healed the sick and the possessed.

What is behind this text is the idea that the resurrection of Jesus has contributed to 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.

This text allows us to understand the point of today's Gospel as Jesus appears to his apostles and gives them the power to forgive sins. The Gospel starts by indicating that the doors of the place where the disciples were hiding were locked. Then, it accounts of the two apparitions of Jesus in their midst and his wishing them peace. It accounts also of his giving them the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sins in his name, as well as his commissioning of them.

After that, the Gospel talks about an incident that happened when Thomas, who was not with the apostles at the moment of the apparition, resolved to believe only when he could see by himself and put his fingers in Jesus' scars.

Then, the Gospel describes another apparition during which Thomas was present and, being confused and ashamed, he could not keep his promise of touching the scars of Jesus. After that, the Gospel reports the reproach of Jesus to Thomas for not having believed without seeing.

The Gospel ends up by recalling that Jesus performed many signs which are not written down in the book and those written are given 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? As we are celebrating today the "Divine Mercy Sunday", I want to talk about God's mercy. First of all, what do we mean by God's mercy? How do we conceive of it? In order to respond, let us turn to the Gospel. In fact, the Gospel says that once Jesus appeared to his disciples, he wished them peace and gave them the authority to forgive sins in his name.

This authority is based on the certitude that God is fundamentally merciful and forgiving. It is also based on the assumption that humans are by nature sinners and consequently cannot make it without God's help and grace.

However, it is very difficult for us to understand God's mercy because our justice is often based on the Law of retribution. That is why people very often say: "I'll get him for that", "I hope they'll get what they deserve", "I'll make him pay for it". Such logic leaves very often little room for mercy.

But, when we say that God is merciful it means that he is compassionate, loving and not judging people according to their guilt. For that reason, even the worst offenders, sinners, and law-breakers, have always a place in God's heart and before him.

It is that mercy which is expressed in the authority he gives to forgive sin in his name. The sacrament of confession we practice in the Church operates on that register, too. It is not a question of minimizing the guilt of people or the gravity of the acts committed, but of making God's bounty and grace prevail over human weaknesses and sins.

As such, the sacrament of confession presupposes a firm trust in God and in the power of the Holy Spirit who operates within it to make salvation effective. On a social level already, it is obvious that without a minimum of trust, life becomes impossible, because otherwise we become suspicious toward one another.

It is that trust which was lacking in Thomas. And that is the reason why Jesus told him "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed". In other words, what Jesus wants to tell him is that he should have trusted the testimony of his friends who told him that Jesus was alive.

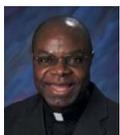
But, why shall we not demand proof before believing? Because proof does not generate faith in someone; on the contrary trust does. For instance, at the time of Jesus, many people had seen his miracles, but only a few believed in him. Those who did not trust him said that it was through the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that he was performing 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 more we trust Jesus, the easier the confession will appear to us. The more, we hesitate about the relevance of his words, the more difficult the confession will be. Of course, I am not minimizing the psychological difficulties some have with this sacrament. Neither am I playing down the fear some have to open up to a priest, as they think that will change the image he has about them. I am not even 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 hearts and purification to the souls. The failure in the Church does not destroy the value of the sacrament.

In fact, Jesus would not have left us this sacrament, if it were not important. Confession is the sacrament of ownership of our acts and of accountability before God. That is why it is important to care more about what God thinks of us than about what people think of us, even if it is a priest. Let us pray, then, that on this Sunday of divine mercy Jesus may help us to be aware of his presence in the sacrament. May he heal us body and soul! May God bless you all!

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



Homily Date: April 3, 2016

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Document Name: 20160403homily.pdf