

## Second Sunday of Easter

My father was a good story teller. He would often recount events that happened to him in his childhood and as then as a young man living in Whyalla and in the mid north of South Australia. When I heard some of those stories as a child I could hardly believe them. My father seemed to grow up in a world that was so different from the world that I knew that I couldn't imagine some of the things that he said he did. But like a good story teller he left me free to discover the truths of those stories when I was ready to hear them.

Our gospel stories are like that. Today's gospel from John the evangelist is a good example of a story being told that gives us the freedom to draw life from it when we are ready. John tells the story of what happened on the night of the Resurrection with you and me in mind, yet he does not preach to us. He then tells us what happened one week later when Jesus came back to allow Thomas to believe in him risen from the dead. But the story is not just about Thomas.

On Easter Sunday evening Jesus greets his disciples with the greeting, "Peace be with you" It is a greeting for us too. He is gifting us with that peace that he promised to give his disciples at the last supper, a peace that the world cannot give, a peace that comes from being in union with the one who has conquered fear and death and the forces of evil. There are times when we especially need to hear that greeting of peace.

When Jesus shows the wounds in his hands and his side He is not just confirming that he is the same person who died on the cross, but those wounds are the constant reminders of the unconditional love that Jesus has for each one of us. He allowed himself to be nailed on the cross in love for us. The last of his life blood flowed from his pierced side so that we could live with him forever. We often look at a crucifix. But only sometimes do we see the love that is there.

We are invited to hear what Jesus says next as also being directed to us. "As the Father sent me, so am I sending you." And for us to do that he breathes his own Spirit of love upon us. The same expression is used here to breathe life upon the apostles, as is used in the Book of Genesis for God breathing life into the first human beings in the Garden of Eden. It is with that Spirit of life that we can act as reconcilers for God. "Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven. For those whose sins you retain they are retained." The love and mercy for all human kind that he showed on the cross is now entrusted to us his disciples. Jesus calls each one of us to be people of mercy, people of forgiveness, people who allow his work of reconciliation to be present wherever we are. But with all the power that is given to be reconcilers, the Lord

also gives us the freedom to use that power or to waste it. We know how easy it is to block God's work by refusing to forgive those who have wronged us.

The story of what happens one week later is told for our sake too. When Thomas returns to join the other disciples, he cannot believe that they have seen the Lord on their word alone. He needs to see Jesus and touch his wounds. On the following Sunday Jesus comes again to allow Thomas to see and touch him. In love he offers his hands and his side to him. "Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe." Jesus understands how hard it is for Thomas, and for any of us to become believers. He does not want Thomas or any of us to remain in a state of uncertainty and unbelief. He wants Thomas to experience the deep joy of knowing that Jesus is alive and with him. Jesus has that same longing for us to believe. Thomas is so moved by Jesus' love for him that he is able to say, "My Lord and My God." Nowhere else in the gospel do we find such a profound act of faith in Jesus. Jesus accepts from us whatever response we are able to make.

Those final words to Thomas are not words of rebuke to him, but they are words of encouragement and blessing for us. "You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe." Thomas and those other disciples to whom Jesus appeared came to faith by seeing Jesus. But everyone else who has come to faith in Jesus has needed those first witnesses to tell the story of what they have seen and to live the truth of what they have heard.

One little detail that we might notice about today's gospel is that John does not talk about Jesus departing from the disciples. When he comes to empower his Church and send them out, he remains with his Church in the person of that Spirit that he breathed upon them. This is the truth that we try to live: But we can easily be overwhelmed by that. Young people especially may not feel ready to proclaim to others that the Risen Lord is at work in them. They are still trying to make sense of the story that has been proclaimed to them. They need the time and the freedom to confirm the truth of the stories what they have heard.

The story of the Resurrection of Jesus is a story that we must keep telling to others, whether they are ready to hear that story or not. But the story we tell now is not so much a story that we tell with words. People will only believe the story when they see how we live. It is the story of the risen Lord alive and at work in each one of us.