

## Second Sunday of Easter

The creative spirit that lies within each of us has emerged in these difficult times. One of the ways that we have seen that creative spirit has been the reworking of familiar songs with new lyrics. Humour has been used to help us reflect upon the very serious situations in which we find ourselves. Music moves us and many of us were moved by hearing Andre Bocelli singing songs that we may have heard before, but in the empty Duomo of Milan, we heard them differently. They were songs that gave us hope.

Listening to our gospels can be like that too. We hear them differently when we allow them to touch into the life that we are living now. John tells the story of what happened on the night of the Resurrection with you and me in mind. 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. It is a story that we all share.

We notice that Jesus comes his disciples in the place where they felt safe from those who had taken the life of their master. This year many of us can understand their fear more than ever. But Jesus comes to greet his fearful disciples with the words, "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.

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. Those wounds are reminder of how much Jesus suffers with everyone who is wounded by sickness, pain or grief.

But Jesus does not want us to dwell upon our own woundedness, but through that woundedness to be there for others. "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. It is with that Spirit of life that we are able to 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 humankind that Jesus 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.

Pope Francis spoke very powerfully on Easter Sunday. He said that this is not a time for indifference, “because the whole world is suffering and needs to be united in facing the pandemic”. This is not a time for self-centredness, continued Pope Francis, because “the challenge we are facing is shared by all”. We all need to recognize ourselves “as part of a single family and support one another”. This is not a time for division, said the Pope, as he appealed for “an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world”. Criticizing the vast amounts of money spent on the arms trade, Pope Francis called for a solution to the ongoing conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Lebanon. This is not a time for forgetfulness, continued Pope Francis, referring to the humanitarian crises being faced in Asia and Africa. He prayed for refugees and migrants “living in unbearable conditions, especially in Libya and on the border between Greece and Turkey”. “Indifference, self-centredness, division and forgetfulness are not words we want to hear at this time”, said the Pope. These words “seem to prevail when fear and death overwhelm us”, and we want to ban them forever, he added.

In today’s gospel we hear that 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 knows how hard it is to believe right now when the world is suffering so much. 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. Thomas is so moved by Jesus’ love for him that he can say, “My Lord and My God.”. Thomas moves from the depths of unbelief to being able to say that here in their midst is God made flesh for us.

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: That we are the Church that is filled with God’s Spirit. We live out the truth that the God who lives in us is a God of love and mercy. We may not be able to gather around the Eucharistic table as a community of disciples. But wherever we are, we are Church making present the Risen Lord. May his love work powerfully through us this week.