

## **Second Sunday of Easter**

I wonder how we will be remembered and described when the history of our parish is written to celebrate its bicentenary in twenty-seven years' time? Will it be anything like what we read from the Acts of the Apostles today? "The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul; no one claimed for his own use anything that they had, as everything they owned was held in common. None of its members was ever in want." What we hear is an ideal picture of the first community of disciples and we may quickly dismiss it as being unattainable for us. But if we could see the hearts of those who make up our community of faith, I think we would see there a deep desire to be the kind of community that watches out for each other and has a real concern for those who are struggling. I would hope that people remember us as people of faith who are always listening for how we can put that faith into action.

Our Easter Gospel stories tell of how the first disciples became people of faith. We hear those stories as being written for us so that we too can come to a deeper faith in the Risen Lord. Today John tells the story of what happened on the night of the Resurrection and then 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 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.” Forgiveness is God’s work, and we can only offer forgiveness to others with God’s love working within 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.” The beginning and the end of John’s gospel are bracketed by the clearest affirmation of the divinity of Jesus. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God.” was how John began his gospel. Now Thomas can proclaim, “My Lord and My God.” The whole purpose of John’s gospel is to show that Jesus is God. John concluded the body of his gospel by saying, “There are many other signs that Jesus worked and the disciples saw, but they

are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that believing this you may have life.”

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 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.