

ECHOING GOD'S WORD
in
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
2nd SUNDAY OF EASTER
(Sunday of Divine Mercy)
April 7, 2024

Lectionary Readings:

Acts 4:32-35	As a community of faith the disciples reach out in compassion.
1 John 5:1-6	Believing in Jesus as Son of God, we triumph over evil.
John 20:19-31	Jesus calls Thomas to faith; Thomas then worships.
Psalms 118:2-4,13-15,22-24	“God's mercy endures forever.”

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the Scriptures carefully in your group, beginning with the Gospel. Take a few minutes in silence to hear the Lord speaking to the heart. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the Church community. What does God want the community to hear today?

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

John:

Jesus shows the community his wounds to establish that the Crucified and the Risen One are one and the same Lord. The historical Jesus who was a man from Nazareth is the same one who is now Lord and God. The humanity of Jesus is essential to the elements of faith: We have been saved by One who is a human being like us. He is also the eternal Son of God.

He breathes on them. The Spirit of God in Genesis hovered over the waters, and life came forth. Now, Jesus sends his Spirit to re-create the world to eternal life. We have been breathed upon by Christ Jesus. He has sent the Spirit to us in baptism, in confirmation, in Eucharist. The same Spirit came upon the Virgin Mary and she conceived. Christ is alive in us, too.

The Church is given its mission by the Lord. Each of us has received that breath from the Risen Lord. The breathing of the Lord Jesus upon the Church represents an imparting of the Holy Spirit to the community of faith that continues now and until the end of time.

Thomas needs his own primary faith experience before he will believe. Others can come to the Lord on the testimony of someone they trust. He needs to see and touch for himself. What he needs to see is evidence of the Passion and death in the one who claims to be the Lord. He needs to see and touch the wounds. In a very deep place in his soul, Thomas knew that the only authentic presentation that the Lord can make of himself lies in his radical identification with suffering humanity. Jesus is not the Son of God if he is not also Son of Man, crucified and raised. The Church today, my parish, my diocese, the Church throughout the world, cannot be the Body of Christ unless it willingly and explicitly gives evidence of the wounds of Christ in its body. We must hold up those who are suffering to prove that we are the real body of Christ. The parish must show its own wounds by putting up front those who are suffering in its membership. The

glorious Church of the high Mass and of the cathedral celebrations is also the Church of the poor, the abused, those who are dying for their faith. The parish liturgies must never fail to include the poor, those who have been oppressed by others and by us. Unless the Church can witness to the Crucified Christ, it is not the body of Christ.

Acts:

In this book, the author of Luke continues proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, risen, exalted, and powerful in the life of the Church. The Gospel of Luke proclaims the Christ of his earthly ministry; Acts proclaims the Christ at work still in the Church. The Jerusalem Church may have been unique in its complete sharing of material goods. None of the other New Testament communities has given such a radical witness to its unity in faith and in service. Service flows from faith. Taking care of the needy is not motivated by economic considerations. A suffering member of the community claims our care.

1 John:

This book is not really a “letter.” It has no greeting nor final salutation. It is rather a theological work or a homily made necessary by a division in the community. It seems that some early Christians did not believe that Jesus had been truly human. Christians are reminded that at baptism they professed their faith in Jesus as the Christ. Now, they must live out that faith in loving God, loving one another, and obeying the commandments. As Jesus was truly in the flesh, we need to live out spiritual realities in concrete, human behaviors. As Jesus was Son of God both at his baptism (water) and at his death (blood), so are we God’s people in this life and in the next.

QUESTIONS

1. In what ways have you heard the Church’s testimony that Jesus is alive and exalted in power at the right hand of the Father? In what ways have you seen evidence of the Lord’s resurrection in the life of the Church? Are there people of hope in your parish community? Are you a sign of the Risen Lord for others? Is your parish more of a burden than it is a witness to the Resurrection?

2. Have you asked one of the neophytes (those newly baptized at Easter) to share Easter faith with you and your group/family/class? What has been your experience of those who are “converts” in the Church? Do they seem to have a livelier faith than those who were “born” Catholics? Why do you think that is so?

3. What has been your experience of renewal in faith and recommitment to apostolic service this Easter? Have you felt that the Lord Jesus has ‘breathed’ on you and sent you out to do the works of the Gospel? Have you felt a call to ministry this Easter?

PRAYER

**O God, who in this day;
through your Only Begotten Son,
have conquered death
and unlocked for us the path to eternity,
grant, we pray, that we who keep
the solemnity of the Lord's Resurrection
may, through the renewal brought by your Spirit,
rise up in the light of life.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.**

(Roman Sacramentary: Easter Sunday, Opening Prayer)

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

The liturgy of the Church assumes that the Lord Jesus Christ is alive and present in the community of faith. The prayers of the Church are offered “through Christ our Lord.” The body of Christ that is the Church prays to the heavenly Father with power and effectiveness through the grace of the Holy Spirit. When the Church prays, it is Christ who prays. When we praise the Father as a faith community, Christ praises the Father through the ministry of our voices and our hearts. When the Church proclaims the good news of salvation in its teaching and preaching, again it is Christ who is speaking to the world of today. When the Church washes the feet of the poor, Christ washes the feet.

“I will be with you always, even until the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20).

“But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs” (Mark 16:20).

By virtue of our baptism, we have become members of the body of Christ; together, all Christian believers constitute the body of Christ and function in the world as the body of Christ.

In confirmation, we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit and sent to do the works of Christ in the world in which we live.

Personally and individually, those who are in Christ are responsible for the works of the Gospel in the environment in which they live. Corporately and collectively, those who are the Church of Jesus Christ have a special visibility that witnesses to the presence and power of the Risen Lord still working in the world. We can truly say, with the Second Vatican Council, that the Church is the sacrament of the Living Christ.

The Lord, present and active in the members of the Church, continues the mission on which he was sent by the Father. The mission of the Church is identical with the mission of Christ himself. Although the Church is made up of sinful men and women, the holiness of Christ shines forth in its ministry.

See The Catechism: # 787-796

© 2017 Rev. Clement D. Thibodeau. All rights reserved.