

Homily for the Second Sunday of Easter Year B

by Fr. Tommy Lane

What a joy for the disciples gathered together on Easter Sunday evening to see Jesus risen from the dead. (John 20:19-31) To be honest we would all like to share this same joy by seeing the risen Jesus. But in fact we already do have this joy because we can see Jesus with the eyes of faith. While we do not see Jesus as the ten disciples on Easter Sunday evening, in our hearts we know that Jesus is with us, in our hearts we see Jesus. (There were ten disciples gathered together because Judas was no more and Thomas was absent.) When we have the joy in our hearts of knowing that Jesus is with us and faith in him what a difference it makes to our lives. Just notice the difference between the ten disciples and how grumpy Thomas was when he returned. What a contrast between the ten disciples and Thomas. The ten disciples had faith in Jesus and received his peace - Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19) - while Thomas did not receive the peace of Jesus, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." (John 20:25) Think of the sadness it must have caused the ten disciples because Thomas refused to believe. They knew he was missing out on the greatest treasure of life, Jesus. But because Thomas was stubborn and insisted on seeing with his eyes, instead of believing in faith, he must have had a very sad week until Jesus came again on the following Sunday evening, that is the evening of today (John 20:26). When we live life with Jesus we are happy, when we shut Jesus out of our lives we can never expect to be happy. There is a very beautiful line in Rev 3:20. It is Jesus who is talking and he issues this beautiful invitation, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me." Jesus issues this invitation to each of us also. Let us open the doors of our hearts to Jesus and let him in to dine with us. Who wants to be unhappy for a week like Thomas? Who wants to be unhappy for a whole lifetime like Thomas? No one, yet how many are deluded by all the attractions of this world, by what we call the American dream. The American dream does not bring happiness; only the peace of Jesus brings happiness. The Gospel passage today concluded with John telling us why he wrote, "that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name." (John 20:31). We can have life only in the name of Jesus. The ten disciples through faith in Jesus learned to cope with his absence. The second reading told us,

“the victory that conquers the world is our faith. Who is the victor over the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5)

Those who have faith are united very deeply, more deeply than by anything else. We heard in the first reading, “The community of believers was of one heart and mind...” (Acts 4:32) What a beautiful description. “The community of believers was of one heart and mind...” Faith in Jesus unites people like nothing else.

Since we do not want to be unhappy for a week like Thomas or a lifetime how can we find this peace of Jesus that the ten apostles had? We can see Jesus with the eyes of faith every time we celebrate the Eucharist here. Remember what the two disciples said on the road to Emmaus after they realized they had just celebrated the Eucharist with Jesus, “Were not our hearts burning within us...” (Luke 24:32) We meet Jesus in the Eucharist here every Sunday. Just as on the road to Emmaus, we listen to the Scriptures and their explanation, and then we receive the Body of Jesus. Let our hearts burn within us each time we celebrate the Eucharist here. Just as Jesus met the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and uplifted them Jesus comes to meet us in every Eucharist and uplifts us. Those who do not come do not have the Eucharist at home. They miss out on meeting Jesus.

Another way in which we receive the peace of Jesus and have him in our hearts - so that we do not remain in the sad and pitiful state Thomas was in during that Easter week - is when we receive the mercy and forgiveness of Jesus. If there is anything in our lives that is not right it is preventing us from full union with Jesus and from enjoying fully the peace he offers to us. And so in our Gospel today Jesus gave his apostles the ability to forgive sins,

“Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” (John 20:22-23)

Some say, “Why do we have to confess our sins to a priest?” This is a good question, seeking to probe deeper into the mysteries of our faith. The answer to this question is found in the words of Jesus to his apostles in the Gospel today.

“Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” (John 20:22-23)

It was Jesus himself who commissioned his apostles to forgive sins. Since bread and wine change into the Body and Blood of Jesus through the prayer of the priest why does it seem strange that God would also use priests to forgive sins in his name? Since God has commissioned priests to baptize children and so make them sons and daughters of God why does it seem strange that priests can also forgive sins in the name of God? Since God brings healing to the sick when they are anointed by priests during the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick why does it seem strange that God would also use priests to forgive sins in his name? I could give many other reasons but I hope we can see that God has no problem with being humble to allow his priests to forgive sins in his name, even though we too are sinners. God does not have a problem with that. If we do, why? Is it because we are not as humble as God. Is it because we think God should do things differently? Do we really know better than God? God has chosen his priests to bring his sacraments to us including his forgiveness. To have peace in our hearts and the joy of Jesus, let us make frequent use of this most beautiful and wonderful sacrament which heals our souls and restores us to unity with Jesus again after we have turned away from him. We do not want to be sad like Thomas during Easter week, we want to have the peace of Jesus that the ten apostles received on Easter Sunday evening.

Following the revelations of Jesus to St. Faustina in Poland we call today [Divine Mercy Sunday](#). We celebrate the mercy of Jesus in a special way today. We prepared for this celebration by a novena of praying the Chaplet of Divine Mercy beginning on Good Friday. Our celebration concludes this afternoon with a special Mass during which the image of Jesus, Divine Mercy, will be venerated, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation will be available today. Indeed we are reminded of the image of Divine Mercy by our second reading today stating that Jesus came by water and blood (1 John 5:6). Jesus said to St. Faustina, "Tell ailing mankind to draw close to my merciful heart and I will fill them with peace. Mankind will not find consolation until it turns with confidence to my mercy and love." This reminds me of the Gospel today. The disciples were gathered in the Upper Room and were afraid. But Jesus came to them with his message of peace, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19) They were no longer afraid. It is like that for us too. We will not find peace until we find it in Jesus. Jesus' message for each of us today is to find our peace in him. The Gospel was written, "that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name." (John 20:31). We can have life only in Jesus.

