

2nd Sunday of Easter

Year B

Faith: Our Victory Over The World.

*We come together today like the first group of believers,
united heart and soul,
and celebrating our victory over the world
through our faith in Christ, the Son of God.*

(Readings: Acts of the Apostles 4: 32-35. United, heart and soul.
1 John 5: 1-6. Anyone who has been begotten by God has already overcome the world.
John 20: 19-31. Eight days later, Jesus came.)

Jesus was dead and buried. It was now Sunday evening, 48 hours later, and his disciples were still in Jerusalem. But why? What were they still doing there given that both the place and the people who controlled it absolutely terrified them?

The memory of Jesus' violent death was still painfully fresh in their minds. For all they knew, the same fate awaited them. Perhaps the authorities, who had executed their leader were, at this very moment, arranging to get rid of the whole group.

If Jesus had been guilty of treason and blasphemy, it wasn't unreasonable to suppose that his followers were as well. – So why not just wipe out the entire movement, and be done with it? That line of reasoning was well within the realms of possibility. It could have happened exactly that way, and the disciples were aware of it. And yet, they still remained in Jerusalem.

Today's Gospel shows them gathered in a secret place, with all the doors locked. And they took this security because they were afraid of the Jews. So why did they stay in Jerusalem and not slip off, back home to Galilee where they'd be far safer?

We can but speculate. Perhaps they stayed to participate in the sacred feast. Or maybe they felt compelled to stay in the last place Jesus had been alive, no matter how dangerous it may be. Whatever their reason for staying, it is fairly easy to guess what they were doing. They were grieving and remembering.

Part of the time they were lost, deep in private and personal thought. Part of the time they reminisced among themselves. It was only two days since Jesus died, and he had already become a memory. And so the mood of the gathering could be described as one of fear coupled with disappointment at letting Jesus down. It was a mood of grief and fond memories, but very soon that mood was to be shattered by a totally unexpected event. It was the last thing any of them expected. Jesus entered the room, stood before them and said, "Peace be with you."

Understandably, they were entirely amazed. In fact, and not to put too fine a point on it, they were totally gob-smacked by the suddenness and wonder of it all. He said the words again, "Peace be with you." Then to avoid any possibility of mistaken identity, he showed them the scars in his hands, and in his feet, and in his side.

There *was* no doubt about it. This really was Jesus!

Their fondest memory had suddenly become a living presence; the sight of their Lord, standing there, before their very eyes, alive and radiant, triggered spontaneous happiness. Then Jesus said to them, “As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.”

Slowly, the Apostles were being re-enlivened, reanimated. There was a glow growing inside of them, a fire was being stirred and rekindled up in them. From being as good as dead, they were coming alive again.

Then Jesus did something that reminded them of what God had done when he created the first man and brought life out of dust. He breathed new life in them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven: for those whose sins you retain, they are retained.” What a wonderful gesture on Jesus’ part. Here were these men who had betrayed him to death only two days ago, and now, Jesus is giving them this marvellous gift of forgiving others.

Now, Thomas was not with the other apostles when Jesus appeared, so they told him of their experience on his returned. But Thomas refused to believe them, not because of any unwillingness on his part, he desperately wanted their story to be true, he simply couldn’t believe it without physical proof.

The cross had totally crushed his faith, and even the assurance of his closest friends couldn’t restore it again. He had to witness it for himself, to see it with his own eyes. Jesus complied with the demands of Thomas. Only then could Thomas make his famous act of faith; “My Lord and my God.”

Then Jesus gave a blessing, and said something very comforting for all those who believe in his resurrection. “You believe”, he said, “because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

Belief in the risen Lord is, indeed, a very comforting thought, a comfort I wish for her majesty, our queen Elizabeth and for all the royal family at this very difficult time for them. – But comfort is not the complete message of Easter, for Easter is also a sobering challenge. And the challenge is in Jesus’ words... “As the Father has sent me, so am I sending you.”

The great message they were to proclaim was that Jesus has risen. And he commissions them for the task saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit. And share my peace and forgiveness with the whole world.”

The apostles did their bit. – Now, it’s up to us to do ours.