

2nd Sunday of Easter (A)
(Acts 2:42-47 / John 20:19-31)
19.04.2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

We have just heard in the gospel that “on the evening of the day of the Lord’s resurrection, the disciples were gathered together. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them: ‘Peace be with you’. ... Eight days later the disciples were gathered together again. Once more Jesus came in and stood among them. ‘Peace be with you’, he said.” The narrative of these two apparitions of Jesus is at the origin of the memorial of the Lord’s resurrection we celebrate every Sunday, week after week, something the Church has done now for more than two thousand years.

The Risen Lord promised us to be with us always. And He is. He is with us on joyful occasions; and He is with us in times of trial, when our hearts and minds are filled with fear and anxiety. He is with us in the darkness of our confinements or our hospital beds. He is with us bringing hope, opening and enlarging the horizon of our lives. He is with us bringing peace of mind and heart.

But the Risen Lord is with us in a privileged way on Sundays when we gather together to remember his resurrection and welcome his presence. There, He comes to us through his word, through the sacrament of his body and blood, and through one another.

A temptation for us is to reduce the Christian life to a personal relationship with God: ‘I’ listen to the Lord, ‘I’ try to do his will, and ‘I’ receive his Body and Blood in communion. This is not bad; it is even a good start; but there is a communal dimension which is missing, the dimension of the Church. The Church is the Body of Christ. Christ is the head. We are the members. The Risen Lord relates to us not only as individuals but above all as members of a body, His body, the Church.

When we gather together to celebrate our Sunday Eucharist, the Risen Lord comes to us not only through his word and the sacrament of his Body and Blood, but also through the members of the Church. In our Sunday Eucharist, God’s love for us is manifested to us by the Lord himself who speaks to us and gives himself to us in the sacrament of his Body and Blood, and by the members of the Church who celebrate the Eucharist with us and who manifest God’s love to us by their loving attention in our regard. In our turn, we reveal God’s love to others by being present to them and ready to help.

The communal dimension of our life of faith is essential. If we look at the biblical tradition, usually God does not enter into relationship with individuals, but with a people, his people, and consequently with the members of his people. In the Old Testament, God made a covenant with his people and renewed it with them several times. At what the Bible calls the end of time, he made a new and eternal covenant between his Son Jesus and the Church to which we belong and of which we are members. Once again, our relationship with the Risen Lord is not just about the Risen Lord and ourselves, but about the Risen Lord and the wider Church with ourselves as members of that Church.

As believers, we are not individuals cut off from others, but members of a people, members of the Church, members of the Body of Christ. There is a solidarity, a communion between us. The first reading from the Acts of the Apostles heard this morning underlines this point strongly: “The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and share out the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed”.

This is important to reflect on this point at a moment in history when we cannot gather together in community, in Church, to celebrate the Lord’s resurrection. Our sadness should not only be around not being able to receive Holy Communion but also around not being able to meet with fellow believers through whom God reveals his love to us and to whom we are called to manifest God’s love. Perhaps what is happening to us this year is an opportunity for us to examine the soundness of our weekly encounter with the Risen Lord at Sunday Eucharist and perhaps to correct what has to be corrected. The call addressed to us is a call to appreciate the Eucharist and especially its communal dimension more deeply. It is a call to look forward to praying with others in a better way.

The first words the Risen Lord spoke to his disciples were: ‘Peace be with you’. Peace is not a banal word like ‘Hi’ or ‘Hello’! It is a meaningful word. We are told that the marks of the nails in the hands of the Risen Lord were still visible. They were shown as the proof that the Risen Lord has won the victory over evil and death. ‘Peace be with you’ means: ‘do not fear’, ‘do not be afraid’: I am with you victorious. I am offering you a share in my victory. The threat of the coronavirus can legitimately fill us with fear. But the Risen Lord murmurs into the secret of our hearts and minds: ‘Peace be with you’. A new day is dawning. I will give you a share in my victory. This invisible evil, the virus, will not have the last word. Hope with me. You will not be disappointed. There is an end to the tunnel. We shall see light again!

The peace offered to us by Christ is also the forgiveness of our sins. The peace of the Lord is the fruit of divine mercy which we celebrate on this second Sunday of Easter. By his passion and his death, the Lord took all our sins away and set us free from their hold upon us. We were slaves to our sins. We are now sinners who are forgiven, set free from guilt and shame. Divine mercy is God’s justice. God’s justice is not about punishment; we do not have to pay a price to God for the wrong we have done. On the contrary divine mercy is about his free pardon; it is about rehabilitation, reconciliation, restoration, healing. The parable of the merciful Father and his two sons in Luke’s gospel chapter 15 is a perfect example of this: When the prodigal son comes back home, the merciful father does not ask him for an account of all that he has done. On the contrary he simply welcomes him with his arms wide opened. He celebrates and rejoices because his son who was dead has come to life; he was lost and he is found. This is God’s mercy! This is divine justice!

In this Eucharist, we are called by the Risen Lord to be merciful in regard to one another as he is merciful with us; to keep our hearts open to all. May God’s grace come to our help! The Risen Lord brings us peace. May we receive that gift for ourselves and share it with others!