

Reflection for the 2nd Sunday of Easter, Cycle C

The lectionary translation of the readings for this Sunday can be found at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/042725.cfm>

1st Reading: *Acts 5:12–16*

During the Easter season we will be hearing from the Acts of the Apostles about the early Church and its work of continuing our Lord's ministry. The selection we have today occurs after the Pentecost story. It's kind of a summary of the good that was done and the growth of the Church.

2nd Reading: *Revelation 1:9–11a, 12–13, 17–19*

This is the beginning of the Book which is commonly called the Apocalypse, it is a Revelation to John who is a prisoner because he preached the Gospel. He was held on the on the penal colony called Patmos. This selection tells of a vision he experienced in which he is told to share it with the 7 churches. These churches correspond with the dioceses we have today and were probably more the size of one of our large parishes. They were led by an overseer, called an *episkopos*, which we, today, call bishops.

Gospel: *John 20:19–31*

But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name. Jn 20:31

Gospel Reflection

I don't like calling Thomas "Doubting Thomas" because doing so seems to imply that something was wrong with him. I don't think there was anything wrong with him. He was just down in the dumps. He lost his Rabbi and missed him. He didn't want mere word to take away his authentic suffering. I like thinking of him as "Skeptical Thomas" because that implies, to me at least, that he was too smart to be taken. He didn't want the other disciples' words to manipulate him. He was using his head!

That didn't stop Jesus. Jesus came for him and gave him what he said he would need to become a believer. And, it worked! And this selection today ends with John explaining that he wrote these storied down so we could come to believe. For that to be effective, I think we need to know what being a believer means.

Look at the sequence of events from Jesus' first visit to the disciples. Jesus showed them his hands and his side. They believed and Jesus told them they were being sent on mission. He gave them the Holy Spirit to guide them on that mission and he told them the mission is a mission of reconciliation.

Don't get stuck thinking the Holy Spirit was only given for the power to forgive or retain sins. Sacramental Confession, as we know it today, didn't exist back then. We all have the power to forgive or retain sins. We always have. But I know that Jesus wants us to be instruments of forgiveness. We should be instruments of reconciliation like he was. That's why the Father sent him and therefore why he is sending us.

The forgiveness Jesus practiced was so much more than saying “It’s O.K. dude, I forgive you.” But if that is all we do, it’s merely an exercise of wielding power over the other person. Reconciliation means to bring the other person back into right relationship with life, with the person they offended, with God and with their very selves. Our reconciling has to be an act of love that draws the other person in.

And be like Jesus. Find out what the other person needs in order to be reconciled; not what we think they need but, like Thomas, what they think they need. If we happen to be the offended party, maybe all they need is for us to recognize our role in what happened. If someone else is the offended party, or if it is life in general that they are out of sync with, it may be more difficult. Nevertheless, that’s the mission Jesus has given us.

Oh my gosh! Jesus is so demanding. But guess what. If we do it, we will experience the presence of the risen Lord in every one of those reconciling situations. I know you’ve had an experience like that in the past and you know how life-giving it is. That’s how we become believers without physically seeing the risen Lord and how John’s purpose for writing his Gospel is fulfilled; through our belief, we will have life in his name.

God bless...

P.S. Sometimes people need to be reconciled when they are not the sinner. It might be the sin of another or corporate sin that is holding them back. That’s another homily but suffice it to say, they need love.]

Personal Reflection:

But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name. Jn 20:31

Question:

What words or phrases attracted your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they attracted your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

Alternative:

Share about/Reflect upon a time when you were reconciled with another person. What was the offense? What was your part in what happened? What was the other person’s part? How did you reconcile? What did reconciliation feel like? What would need to change in your life for you to become a minister of reconciliation?

Verse by Verse:

Jn 20:19 “...Peace be with you.” | This is equivalent to modern concept of being at peace in our heart and soul. It stands in contrast to the disciples locking the doors for fear of the Jews. It is used similarly in Jn 14:27 and Jn 16:23.

Jn 20:20 “...he showed them his hands and his side.” | Remember that this is his resurrected body which is described as having physical attributes as well as transcending the physical.

Jn 20:21b "...As the Father has sent me, so I send you." | Not only are we gathered by the Lord, we are also sent to carry out the Father's will just as Jesus was. This concept occurs several times in John's Gospel; Jn 4:38, Jn 13:16, Jn 13:20 and Jn 17:18. Jn 17:18 echoes this passage.

Jn 20:22a "After saying this..." | It appears to me that this connecting phrase must be more than a sequence marker. It connects the giving of the Holy Spirit to the sending of the disciples.

Jn 20:22a "he breathed on them..." | This points back to Gen 2:7, the Creation Story, wherein God blows the breath of life into Adam. This points to the new life in the Spirit. In Acts of the Apostles, the Spirit is given at Pentecost which also results in the active ministry of the disciples.

Jn 20:23 "If you forgive... they are forgiven; if you retain... they are retained." | The sending, the giving of the Holy Spirit, and the ministry of reconciliation are connected. God's will, evidently, is that all be reconciled even though the concept of sins being retained is also stated here. It should be recognized that this ministry is not just practiced in sacramental reconciliation. We are all to participate in the ministry of reconciliation by being instruments of God's forgiveness. A formalized method of the laity participating in this ministry is shown in James 5:16.

Jn 20:25 "...I refuse to believe." | Thomas leaves an opening that it might be true; he will believe only if he experiences the risen Lord. It appears to me that it is not a complete doubting of the concept but maybe an emotional emptiness that doesn't allow him to believe until he experiences it.

Jn 20:26 "Now a week later..." | The first appearance in this story is on Sunday, the day of the Resurrection. This appearance is on the following Sunday. Some scholars point out that this may be an indication that the Church began gathering every Sunday from a very early date.

Jn 20:27 "...Put your finger here..." | Jesus was giving Thomas what he said he needed to be able to believe.

Jn 20:28 "My Lord and my God!" | Thomas recognizes Jesus a God who is his Lord. Pointing out that Jesus is God is important to John's Gospel.

Jn 20:29 "Blest are those who have not seen..." | This seems to me to be a set-up for the conclusion in the next verses.

Jn 20: 31 "But these are written that you may come to believe..." This states the whole purpose of John's Gospel.