

April 28, 2019

2nd Sunday of Easter – Sunday of Divine Mercy

John 20:19-31

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

Background:

Most Westerners have become accustomed to a world of visible information. Researchers have discovered that some learn best when information is presented visually, while others learn by doing. There are also those who seem to take great pride in being people who want to see for themselves. Through the capabilities of technology, we can search the bottom of the sea for a missing plane, the vastness of outer space, or the events that are taking place in the middle of the night on the other side of the earth. This same technology can be used to deceive, cover up, and convince us that we are exploring something real but in reality, it exists only in our imaginations. Think of the powerful experience of 3D movies. Obviously, none of this was part of the world in which Jesus or the early disciples lived.

Unlike the synoptic gospels, John's gospel does not contain a Last Supper/Passover account. Instead, John precedes the passion and death of Jesus with a farewell address. As part of this address Jesus says, "My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. You heard me tell you, 'I am going away and I will come back to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father; for the Father is greater than I." (John 14:27-28) Later in that discourse Jesus again addresses the disciples, "you also are now in anguish. But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. On that day you will not question me about anything." (John 16:22-23a) In the text for this Sunday, John describes how Jesus has fulfilled what he said in that farewell address.

The gospel text is composed of two almost identical appearances of the risen Lord. Both appearances take place on the first day of the week. The disciples are gathered, the doors are locked, Jesus appears in their midst, he greets them with the greeting of peace, and he shows them the wounds of the crucifixion. The repetition of these details draws attention to the ways the two appearances are different. Perhaps the most noticeable difference is the absence of Thomas in the first appearance. When he is told by the others that Jesus has appeared to them, he refuses to accept their testimony, and he refuses to accept them as credible witnesses of the truth of their testimony. Even if the others have seen the risen Jesus, he will not believe unless he can not only see but touch the wounds. Thus, the second difference is that Thomas is invited by Jesus to touch the wounds of the crucifixion. Another difference is the kind of response the disciples and Thomas have to the presence of the risen Christ. In the first account, the disciples are filled with joy. In the second appearance, Thomas responds with a statement of faith in Jesus as his Lord and his God. The last difference is in the way the appearance impacts those beyond the event itself. In the first incident, Jesus commissions the disciples to be instruments of God's forgiveness. In the second appearance, Jesus refers those who believe, but have not had the unique experience of Thomas and the disciples--he calls them blessed.

Reflection Questions:

1. When I lock the door...
2. If you had been in that room with the disciples before Jesus first appeared among them, what they were probably saying was things like...
3. In both appearances, the first thing Jesus says to the disciples is, "Peace be with you." Why is it important for the disciples to hear Jesus say this to them both times he comes among them?
4. Certainly, this gospel does not give us all the conversation that took place that night. What are some of the things you think the disciples might have wanted to say to Jesus? What are some of the things Jesus would have liked to say to them?
5. Imagine that you are Thomas being told by the others that the risen Lord has come and stood among them while he was gone. Some of the things that you would be thinking as they describe Jesus' presence among them would be...
6. What might be some of the things going through Thomas' mind as Jesus comes among them a second time and asks him to examine his wounds?
7. Is it possible that Jesus is inviting you to touch his wounds?
8. Can you take some time to talk to God honestly your need for peace, Jesus's response to Thomas in this gospel, or whatever arose within you from this gospel?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

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Excerpts from the readings for April 28, 2019, the Second Sunday of Easter (Sunday of Divine Mercy)

Many signs and wonders were done among the people at the hands of the apostles. They were all together in Solomon's portico. None of the others dared to join them, but the people esteemed them. Yet more than ever, believers in the Lord, great numbers of men and women, were added to them. Thus they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them. A large number of people from the towns in the vicinity of Jerusalem also gathered, bringing the sick and those disturbed by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.

*Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting. Let the house of Israel say, "His mercy endures forever." Let the house of Aaron and those who fear the Lord say, "His mercy endures forever." I was hard pressed and was falling, but the Lord helped me. My strength and my courage is the Lord, and he has been my savior. The joyful shout of victory in the tents of the just:
The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. By the Lord has this been done;*

it is wonderful in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it.

I, John, found myself on the island called Patmos because I proclaimed God's word and gave testimony to Jesus. I was caught up in spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a voice as loud as a trumpet, which said, "Write on a scroll what you see." Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and when I turned, I saw seven gold lampstands, and in the midst of them one like a son of man, wearing an ankle-length robe, with a gold sash around his chest. When I caught sight of him, I fell down at his feet as though dead. He touched me with his right hand and said, "Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, the one who lives. Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever. I hold the keys to death and the netherworld. Write down, therefore, what you have seen, and what is happening, and what will happen afterwards."

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." Then he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." A week later Thomas was with the disciples, and Jesus stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. 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.

Excerpts from Acts 5:12-16; Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-2; Revelations 1:9-13, 17-19; and John 20:19-31