

2020 2nd Easter Homily

Fear, as we know is a very strong emotion. It can play havoc with our imaginations as we write a script that will probably never happen but which keeps us locked within ourselves. In today's gospel we are told that the disciples were behind closed doors out of fear, more questions than answers going through their minds. Would what had happened to Jesus, his terrible suffering and death, something they were unable to watch, happen to them?

It is into their fear and apprehension that Jesus appears, and his first words are words of peace. They would have needed to hear this because their behaviour during Jesus' suffering and death had hardly been exemplary. They had let him down badly, disowned him, denied him, deserted him. Humanly speaking they could have expected a dressing down, instead Jesus says, Peace be with you, not once but twice. We think of those in our world who are not at peace; because of war; oppression; injustice or inequality. In our own country the incidence of domestic violence has risen sharply during the pandemic, how can there be peace in such situations? Jesus then gives them a mission, "As the Father sent me, so am I sending you." Despite the recent past, despite their weakness, lack of courage and failings, Jesus is sending them out, but not alone because Jesus then breathed on them, saying 'receive the Holy Spirit.' In John's Gospel the day of resurrection is also the day of Pentecost, and it is because they have been gifted with the Holy Spirit that they will be able to go out and continue Jesus ministry of healing and forgiveness, of speaking words of peace and bringing about change.

As we know Thomas was absent when Jesus first appeared. Where he was, what he was doing we don't know, what we do know is that, not only would he not believe the others when they told him they had seen Jesus, but he laid down conditions. 8 days later Jesus came again with Thomas present. It would be good to know what he was feeling as Jesus fulfilled his conditions, what we do know is his response, "My Lord and my God," the greatest profession of faith in the gospels. Thomas believed because he saw Jesus who now pronounces 'blessed' those who believe and have not seen Jesus, ourselves among them. Perhaps this should be the ninth Beatitude!

We have no experience of the physical presence of Jesus and yet we are linked through time with those who did. All of us may be able to associate with the disciples' fear, lack of understanding and courage, weakness and failure. We may remain locked up inside ourselves in this time of pandemic when the coronavirus proves it is no respecter of persons. When we feel this way it is good to remember that the Holy Spirit working in and through the disciples is the same Spirit who continues to work in and through us today, transforming our lives and enabling us to transform the lives of others, especially the poorest and most marginalised, not only speaking words of peace but refusing always to resort to violence of any kind.

Bidding Prayers for the 2nd Sunday of Easter

Celebrant:

Let us pray to God, who raised Jesus to life and exalted him at his own right hand.

Reader:

For the Church – that it will always proclaim the resurrection of Jesus from the dead with courage and conviction. Lord in your mercy

For those who are suffering the horrors of violence and war – that the words of peace spoken by Jesus in today's Gospel will become a reality in their lives.

Lord in your mercy

For ourselves on this Divine Mercy Sunday – that we will grow in our gratitude and appreciation of God's merciful compassion and forgiveness and show mercy and compassion to others, especially when we have been hurt.

Lord in your mercy

For all those affected by the Coronavirus pandemic, the dead, the dying, the sick; those who have lost their livelihoods, the unemployed and also those who are using every ounce of energy to care for those in hospitals and care homes – that together we will do all we can to eradicate this virus. Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, especially all victims of violence, accident and natural disaster, for Carol Smith who died recently and Agnes Knight, Frank Edmondson, Rose Ward, Winifred Ash, Farrell Brooks, Mary Newton, Dianne Greenwood, Frank Hooson, Leslie Osbaldeston, Gerard Higgins and Lavar Heaton whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory. Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

God of eternal compassion, each Easter you rekindle the faith of your people. Give them still greater grace that all may truly share the life of the risen Jesus. Through Christ our Lord. Amen