

Second Sunday of Easter

Year A



FIRST READING
Acts 2:42-47

PSALM
Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

SECOND READING
1 Peter 1:3-9

GOSPEL
John 20:19-31

PRAYER

Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

Let the House of Israel say,
'His faithful love endures for ever.'
Let the House of Aaron say,
'His faithful love endures for ever.'
Let those who fear Yahweh say,
'His faithful love endures for ever.'

I was pushed hard, to make me fall,
but Yahweh came to my help.
Yahweh is my strength and my song,
he has been my Saviour.
Shouts of joy and salvation,
in the tents of the upright,
'Yahweh's right hand is triumphant,

The stone which the builders reject-
ed has become the cornerstone;
This is Yahweh's doing,
and we marvel at it.
This is the day which Yahweh has
made,
a day for us to rejoice and be glad.

READING THE WORD

First Reading
Acts 2:42-47

Those who believed remained
faithful to the teaching of the

apostles, to the brotherhood, to
the breaking of bread and to the
prayers. And everyone was filled
with awe; the apostles worked
many signs and miracles.

And all who shared the faith
owned everything in common;
they sold their goods and pos-
sessions and distributed the pro-
ceeds among themselves accord-
ing to what each one needed.

Each day, with one heart, they
regularly went to the Temple
but met in their houses for the
breaking of bread; they shared
their food gladly and generous-
ly; they praised God and were
looked up to by everyone. Day
by day the Lord added to their
community those destined to be
saved.

Second Reading
1 Peter 1:3-9

Blessed be God the Father of
our Lord Jesus Christ, who in
his great mercy has given us
a new birth into a living hope
through the resurrection of Je-
sus Christ from the dead and
into a heritage that can never be
spoilt or soiled and never fade
away. It is reserved in heaven for
you who are being kept safe by
God's power through faith until

the salvation which has been
prepared is revealed at the final
point of time.

This is a great joy to you, even
though for a short time yet you
must bear all sorts of trials; so
that the worth of your faith,
more valuable than gold, which
is perishable even if it has been
tested by fire, may be proved --
to your praise and honour when
Jesus Christ is revealed.

You have not seen him, yet you
love him; and still without see-
ing him you believe in him and
so are already filled with a joy
so glorious that it cannot be de-
scribed; and you are sure of the
goal of your faith, that is, the sal-
vation of your souls.

Gospel
John 20:19-31

In the evening of that same day,
the first day of the week, the
doors were closed in the room
where the disciples were, for
fear of the Jews. Jesus came and
stood among them. He said to
them, 'Peace be with you,' and,
after saying this, he showed
them his hands and his side.

The disciples were filled with joy
at seeing the Lord, and he said to
them again, 'Peace be with you.'

'As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.' After saying this he breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained.'

Thomas, called the Twin, who was 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 answered, 'Unless I can see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe.' Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you,' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving any more but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him: 'You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.'

There were many other signs that Jesus worked in the sight of the disciples, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name.

HEARING THE WORD

"Living the Resurrection"

The Liturgy of Easter Sunday focused on Jesus' resurrection and the gift of eternal life it brought us. However, eternal life lies in the future. The inevita-

ble question arises: "How do we live in this present world in view of the resurrection that awaits us?" This second Sunday of Easter provides some answers and suggestions.

In the first reading we hear about the very first Christian community which was formed in Jerusalem after Jesus's resurrection and the subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit. This is an ideal picture of the community of shared possessions where members have everything in common and focus entirely on prayer. Such a lifestyle is cultivated today by some monastic communities. But the vast majority of Christians today live their lives as members of individual families with most of their time occupied by work. It does not mean however, that they cannot live this ordinary life in view of the resurrection. In fact, the most important part of this passage is found in the very first line which identifies the four essentials of the Christian life: the teaching of the apostles, membership of the community, partaking in the Eucharist, and prayer. The teaching of the apostles refers to the truths of faith and moral instructions which were revealed by Jesus and then transmitted to us by the apostles. Community membership means that our faith is not an individual matter but has to be practised within the community of the Church and in contact with other Christians. The Eucharist to which the passage refers in the phrase "breaking of the bread", speaks of the

spiritual nourishment we receive through the body and blood of Christ. Finally, prayer is a necessary practice to open the Christian heart to God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Those who base their lives on these four foundations live the risen life already in this world.

The reading from the letter of Peter very realistically admits that life in this world inevitably includes trials, tribulations and even persecutions. How do we endure these without diluting our faith commitment and losing the perspective of the resurrection? The author very skilfully shows the way. He begins with words of thanksgiving to God for the resurrection of Jesus which brought the gift of life eternal, vividly described as a heavenly "heritage that can never be spoilt or soiled and never fade away". It is then that he mentions the trials and tribulations of the present life. He considers these as a test of faith. Those who are able to withstand them without losing faith demonstrate that they have truly believed, not merely for the sake of the future reward, but because they have genuinely loved Christ. The outcome of such commitment is eternal salvation. The author indirectly tells Christians that the trials and tribulations of the present life can be endured successfully if we keep the final destiny before our eyes. That destiny is the resurrection and eternal salvation that awaits us. Such a perspective provides a powerful

motivation and strength to endure whatever adversity we might face.

The Gospel passage presents us with two appearances of Jesus. Both of them demonstrate the impact of the resurrection on the believers' life in three aspects. In the first scene the fearful disciples are hidden in a locked room. The threat of violence and death which Jesus suffered paralysed them. The risen Lord comes into their midst passing through the closed door. He now has a different kind of body which cannot be hindered by physical barriers. He begins by saying "Peace be with you" and then shows them his wounds. Clearly, this is the same Jesus who hung on the cross. By greeting them with words of peace while showing them the wounds he indicates that death has been conquered. They may now have peace because in the very person of their master, they see evidence that he had overcome death. They should fear no longer because they see a living proof that even death cannot defeat them. There is no more need for closed doors and hiding.

Next, Jesus repeats the greeting of peace followed by sending them on a mission of forgiveness. Jesus brought about peace by defeating death through resurrection. Their mission is to bring about peace by forgiveness. In many ways

forgiveness is also a defeat of death. Violence and revenge lead to death while forgiveness leads to harmony and peace. Disciples are to defeat death by forgiveness.

The second scene focuses on Thomas. This member of the Twelve was not with the rest in the room. Was he so afraid that he abandoned his fellow apostles and hid

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*What is required
of us is faith
that Jesus truly
has risen*

alone? Regardless of his reasons, he is confronted by Jesus and, like the rest, shown the proof that Jesus had defeated death. Thomas is invited to touch Jesus' wounds and thus be assured that the resurrection is real. As he makes the profession of faith in the beautiful words "my Lord and my God", Jesus pronounces a blessing upon all those who have not seen him and yet believe. These words address all the subsequent generations of Christians, including us today. We have not had the chance, like Thomas, to touch Jesus' wounds. Yet, we do not need to. What is required of us is faith that Jesus truly has risen, faith based on the testimony of those who saw and experienced him.

Living the resurrection and keeping our focus on eternal life is never easy in this world, and faith in the resurrection does not come automatically. The daily struggles, sufferings, fears and doubts can easily prevent us from

keeping our final destiny in mind. St Peter in his letter and St John in the Gospel acknowledged that. And yet that faith is very necessary for our Christianity to be lived as it should. We need help to live the resurrection already. Our faith community, the Church, provides us with this help through its teaching, its support, and through the Eucharist. Prayer and forgiveness are further helps that bring the resurrection into our midst. Living a truly Christian life we not only ensure our eternal salvation in the future but we also defeat death in the present. Living the resurrection daily we introduce the heavenly dimension into this world and make our life into the "the Lord's day". It is then that we can rejoice and celebrate our life in this world using the words of the Psalmist: "This is the day which Yahweh has made, a day for us to rejoice and be glad."

LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD

Observation and experience show that all living creatures find their end in death. We see that we are dying slowly every day and this fills us with fear, sadness and even despair. In one sense death makes us all equal because no one is able to escape from it. In the traditions of our ancestors there are many stories that explain how death come to destroy life and succeeded in doing so. Yet, the story of Jesus is different and it does not end with death. The Word of God tells us that God did not cre-

ate death. It came to us as a result of the envy of Satan, but God in Jesus overcame death. Could there ever be a greater event in the history of the world than the defeat of death?

The Easter message is that Jesus has truly risen. We know it because those who were with him told us so, and their testimony is credible. After all, no one would remember Jesus if his life ended on the cross. The first message his disciples proclaimed to the world was that God conquered death by raising Jesus and that this fact changes everything. While death is still present in our life, its power is no longer final and absolute.

After his resurrection Jesus came and showed himself, his wounds, to the disciples gathered in a closed room. He also gave them his Spirit. But, most importantly, he blessed those who have not seen him and yet believe. This means he blessed us, living today, and his gift of the Spirit is also given to us. We are blessed because even if we did not see him with our own eyes, even if we did not touch him, we believe in him and his resurrection. This faith makes us into a new creation, signs of his resurrection in the world.

The Church helps us to live the resurrection in our daily life. Our baptism is the moment when we die and rise with Jesus. We live the resurrection by participating fully in the life of our communities, sharing the gifts of the Holy Spirit. All the

sacraments are the signs of Jesus' invincible life among us. Whenever we carry our cross, whenever we help the suffering of others, whenever we are ready to forgive, then we show that we die and rise with Him and that we now live the life of resurrection.

One of the best ways in which we can enhance the life of other is to radiate the hope that death is not the final destiny of a human being. In a world where so many things threaten life and push people to despair, being a sign of hope through personal example is one of the greatest gifts we can give and one of the deepest influences we can have. Through his refusal to believe in the resurrection Thomas acted against faith and hope. It is for that reason that Jesus made a special effort to turn him from a person of despair and unbelief to a person of faith and hope. We are asked to do what Jesus did for Thomas in our world, to turn despair and unbelief into faith and hope that can defeat death that still operates in our world. We can do this in the fellowship of our communities through exercising various ministries and services that make our families and groups more vibrant and alive. By living the resurrection in our own life we help to defeat death in our world and in the lives of others, just as Jesus did in the case of the unbelieving Thomas.

PROVERB

"Death is not the end."

ACTION

Self-examination:

What are the beliefs regarding life and death operating in my culture? How do they compare with the Christian message?

How do I participate in the life of my community of faith? Am I a sign of Jesus' resurrection to others?

Response to God:

Sacraments are the signs of risen Christ living in the midst of the community. Do I understand their meaning and power in my life? Do I recognise the risen Christ coming to me in the sacraments? I resolve to receive them regularly.

I resolve to deepen my knowledge of the resurrection of Jesus and allow my life to be affected by it.

Response to your World:

It is said that the world in which we live promotes the culture of death. Are there any actions and behaviours conducted in our individual and group life that proves this statement to be true?

Chose a concrete activity that your group can conduct to promote the culture of life.

PRAYER

*Jesus, the Risen Lord,
you have defeated death
and brought us
the gift of eternal life.
You continue to heal the wounds
that threaten our lives.
You have shown us
that death is not the end
but the beginning
of the new life with you.
Inspire and guide us
to live the gift of the resurrection
in our daily life
and share it with others.
Amen.*