

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 Israel say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”

Let the house of Aaron say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”

Let those who fear the LORD say, “His steadfast love endures forever.” I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the LORD helped me.

The LORD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous:

“The right hand of the LORD does valiantly; The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Reading the Word

First Reading:

Acts 2:42–47

Believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their

possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Second Reading:

1 Peter 1:3–9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescrib-

able and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Gospel: John 20:19–31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then 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.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told 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 in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

*Scripture quotations from
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A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

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

Hearing the Word

"Living the Resurrection"

The Liturgy of Easter Sunday emphasizes the greatness of the gift God bestowed on the faithful in Jesus' resurrection. In the aftermath of the resurrection, the question arises of the practical implications of this gift for daily life. The readings of this Second Sunday of Easter reflect on this question, offering answers and suggestions.

The first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles presents a summary of the life of the very first Christian community, which was formed in Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection and the subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit. This is an ideal picture of the com-

munity of shared possessions, where members have everything in common, and lead a life of intense prayer. Such a demanding and focused lifestyle has not been possible for most ordinary Christians, however, this early community's example provides helpful hints on how ordinary life can still be shaped and influenced by Jesus' 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 Christian faith is not a private and individual matter but has to be practised within the community of the Church, and in contact with other believers. The Eucharist to which the passage refers in the phrase "breaking of the bread", alludes to the spiritual nourishment received through the body and blood of Christ. Finally, prayer is a necessary practice to open the Christian's heart to God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Those who base their lives on these four foundations, already have in this world, a foretaste of the risen life.

The reading from the letter of Peter very realistically admits that life in this world inevi-

tably includes trials, tribulations and even persecutions. How do believers endure these without diluting their faith commitment, and losing their confidence in the resurrection? The author of the letter 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 "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you". In this perspective 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 they keep their final destiny before their eyes. That destiny is the resurrection and eternal salvation that awaits them in the future. Such a perspective provides a powerful motivation and strength to endure whatever adversity we might face.

The Gospel passage presents 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 came into their midst passing through the closed door. He appeared with a different kind of body which could pass through physical barriers. He began by a greeting, "peace be with you", and then showed them his wounds. Clearly, this was the same Jesus who hung on the cross. By greeting them with words of peace while showing them the wounds he indicated that death had been conquered. The disciples may now have peace because, in the very person of their master, they saw 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 repeated the greeting of peace followed by sending them on a mission of forgiveness. Jesus brought about peace by defeating death through resurrection, their mission was to bring about peace by forgiveness. In many ways, forgiveness also defeats death as violence and revenge lead to death, while forgiveness leads to harmony and peace. The disciples are to defeat death by mediating forgiveness.

The second appearance of Jesus focuses on Thomas. This member of the twelve was not with the rest when Jesus first came into the closed room. Was he so afraid that

he abandoned his fellow apostles and hid somewhere else alone? Regardless of his reasons, he was confronted by Jesus and, like the rest, shown the proof that Jesus had defeated death. Thomas was invited to touch Jesus' wounds and thus be assured that the resurrection is real. As he made his profession of faith in the beautiful words, "my Lord and my God", Jesus blessed all those who have not seen him and yet believe. These words address all the subsequent generations of Christians who, unlike Thomas, have no chance to touch Jesus' wounds. Stating this, Jesus emphasised that physical proof is not required to believe that Jesus truly has risen. True faith is based on the testimony of those who saw and experienced the Risen Lord.

Living the resurrection and keeping a focus on eternal life is never easy in this world, and faith in the resurrection does not come automatically. Daily struggles, suffering, fears and doubts can easily prevent believers from keeping their final destiny in mind. Peter in his letter, and John in the Gospel, acknowledged that. And yet, faith in the resurrection is essential for the practice of Christianity; for living the resurrection already in this life. The faith community sustains the risen life of believers through teaching, support, and the Eucharist. Prayer and forgiveness also bring the resurrection power into the community's midst, because they defeat death that comes

with spiritual indifference and hatred. Living the resurrection introduces the heavenly dimension into this world, and makes Christian life into "the Lord's day". Believers can rejoice and celebrate this risen life they already possess with the words of the Psalmist, "This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it".

Listening to the Word of God

Observation and experience prove that all living creatures eventually meet death. Each passing day we die slowly, which fills us with fear, sadness and even despair. In one sense, death makes us all equal because no one is beyond its reach. Folk tales and stories explain how death come to destroy life and succeeded in doing so. Yet, the story of Jesus is different in that it does not end with 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 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

and 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 message of Easter?

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

Response to God

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

Response to your World

I will examine and take step to increase my participation in my faith community, particularly through participation in the Eucharist.

Modern culture has sometimes been described as “the culture of death”. How can we as faith community counter such a culture and become promoters of “the culture of life”.

Prayer

Jesus, 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.