

of us: as victory over sin, evil, and death – over everything that crushes life and makes it seem less human. And this is a message meant for me and for you, dear sister, you, dear brother. How often does Love have to tell us, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead?’ Our daily problems and worries can wrap us up in ourselves, in sadness and bitterness ... and that is where death is. That is not the place to look for the One who is alive!

The Church of Mercy / Pope Francis. 2014

2

Our task, as image-bearing, God-loving, Christ-shaped, Spirit-filled Christians, following Christ and shaping our world, is to announce redemption to the world that has discovered its fallenness, to announce healing to the world that has discovered its fallenness, to announce healing to the world that has discovered its brokenness, to proclaim love and trust to the world that knows only exploitation, fear and suspicion.

The challenge of Easter / N.T. Wright. 2009

Related topics

For further study:

Paschal mystery; baptism; confirmation; Eucharist; sacraments; reconciliation; ecclesiology; symbols: water, light, oil, garment, bread, wine, cross,; community

Closing Prayer

Risen Christ,
for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred:
open the doors of our hearts,
that we may seek the good of others
and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace,
to the praise of God the Father.

CW · Additional Collects · Easter 2

The Second Sunday of Easter

Principal Service readings

Acts 2.14a,22-32

Peter speaks on the day of Pentecost

Psalm 16

Bless God who guides and protects

1 Peter 1.3-9

The inheritance of Christians

John 20.19-31

The risen Christ appears among the disciples

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The risen Christ appears among the disciples

¹⁹When it was evening on 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.’ ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So 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.’

²⁶A 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.’ ²⁷Then 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.’ ²⁸Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ ²⁹Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But 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.

John 20.19-31 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

Liturgical context

The readings for the Sundays of Easter are centred around the the paschal mystery: the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and the sending of the Spirit. John's intention in the final chapters of his gospel are to encourage the faith of those who have not seen and yet believe. The early disciples had to move from their actual experience of the human Jesus to radical faith in the resurrected, glorified Jesus who now lives in the presence of the Spirit in the church today. During Easter we reflect on baptism and our post-baptismal faith, and ask how we are telling our corporate and personal stories of death and resurrection.

Gospel exegesis

In today's two post-resurrection appearances Jesus offers his peace, faith, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and a lasting legacy of forgiveness. Jesus appears first on Easter night, and then a week later. Luke does not relate Jesus' resurrection, ascension and Pentecost as a one-off event, but as a series of events over a period of time. Through this he leads his community into a deeper faith. Is John perhaps more accurate in portraying Jesus as bestowing the Spirit and commissioning his disciples on the same day?

A few verses earlier Jesus has encountered Mary Magdalene at the tomb. She did not recognise him at first and we are led to understand that something has changed: Jesus is different. 'In his new identity, Jesus is no longer subject to the constraints of space and time'.² Today's gospel continues to show Jesus in this altered state as Jesus seems to walk through a locked door. There is no question that it is Jesus, as he shows

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

² *John's gospel in new perspective : christology and the realities of Roman power /* Richard J. Cassidy. – Orbis Books, 1992. – p.71.

his disciples his marked hands and feet. His body is still real, though changed. Earlier in the chapter Mary Magdalene had been told not to touch him, but he can still be seen with the human eye. The incarnation has not ceased, but has been changed into a more transcendent form. Jesus wishes the disciples peace – he does it twice. Then he offers them the gift of his Spirit, commissions them, and sends them out to forgive sins. Why is there such emphasis on the forgiveness of sins? As well as indicating the importance of the forgiveness of sins, the gospel reading shows that the power to forgive comes from the Holy Spirit.

A week later Jesus appears to the disciples again. He miraculously appears through the closed doors again. This time, Thomas is there too. Thomas is given the opportunity to touch the wounds Jesus received on the cross, to encourage his belief. Thomas needed the assurance that it really was the human Jesus he had known. Some scholars see this scene as the culmination of the gospel – everything has led up to this point. Thomas, on seeing Jesus' wounds, acclaims him as Lord and God (20.28). 'Jesus is described as being of the essence of God at the outset of the Gospel, and then, fully twenty chapters later, one of his disciples comes to believe in him fully and affirms him as 'my Lord and my God'.³

Jesus then makes a statement for believers who will come after: 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe' (20.29). John strongly associates belief with eternal life – 'that through believing you may have life in his name' (20.31) – the two cannot be separated.

We can see in Thomas a journey of faith, as he moves from scepticism to belief. Easter reminds us to persevere in our faith in the Risen One even though we have not put our hands in his wounds. We are challenged to live in the presence of the abiding Spirit, to forgive one another, and to proclaim the reign of God.

Quotations

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Jesus no longer belongs to the past but lives in the present and is projected toward the future; Jesus is the everlasting 'today' of God. This is how the newness of God appears to the women, the disciples, and all

³ *Ibid.*, p.72.