

Happy Easter! You might say that Easter Sunday was last week, and of course, you would be right. But the Church celebrates Easter for fifty days. That is longer than Lent, longer than Advent, and much longer than the Christmas season. So this is only the eighth day of the Easter season. We have six weeks to go yet. What we celebrate during the entire Easter season is the new life of the risen Jesus, which is the key message of Christianity and the key reason for us to be happy, even joyous, and so very thankful for our Savior. So Happy Easter indeed!

Our first reading today comes from the Acts of the Apostles. During the Easter Season, all of the first readings come from the Acts of the Apostles instead of the Old Testament. The Acts is the first book in the New Testament (you know, the Testament which takes place after Jesus was born) which follows after the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In this book, written by the same person who wrote the gospel of St. Luke, we read how the apostles went about bringing together the early Christian church after Jesus ascended into heaven. (The Acts begins with Jesus' ascension, even though we celebrate that ascension near the end of the Easter season.)

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles (Acts **5:12-16**)

The apostles worked many miracles and wonders among the people. All of the Lord's followers often met in the part of the temple known as Solomon's Porch. No one outside their group dared join them, even though everyone liked them very much. Many men and woman started having faith in the Lord. The sick people were brought out to the road and placed on cots and mats. It was hoped that Peter would walk by, and his shadow would fall on them and heal them. A lot of people living in the towns near Jerusalem brought those who were sick or troubled by evil spirits, and they were healed. The word of the Lord.

We have this description of what life was like for the apostles and the early Christian community. The community spent a lot of time on Solomon's

Porch, which was outside the temple facing the eastern sun. People outside their community were afraid to spend time with them because the Jewish temple authorities were getting increasingly angry with the entire group. Those who did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah remember that those same authorities were angry with Jesus and arranged for Him to be put to death. However, those people who bothered to learn about Jesus and His words and deeds “started having faith in the Lord.” Many sick were brought to the roadside hoping their illness would be healed by Peter’s shadow as he passed by. What was this about? Could Peter heal people on his own. No he couldn’t. When he healed anyone, he himself would say that it was through the power of the risen Lord Jesus Christ that people were healed. But even Jesus did not heal with His shadow; He healed people by touching them. Even the woman with the bleeding problem was healed when she touched Him from behind. But the apostles were doing even more. They were healing without even touching the sick. The apostles, all servants of Christ, were acting with the power of the risen Christ, the glorified Lord sitting at the right hand of God the Father.

Responsorial Psalm (Psalm **118:2, 4, 13-14**)

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His mercy lasts forever.

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His mercy lasts forever.

Let Israel shout, “His mercy lasts forever!” Let every true worshipper of the Lord shout, “His mercy lasts forever!”

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His mercy lasts forever.

The nation’s attacks were so fierce that I nearly fell, but the Lord helped me. My power and my strength come from the Lord, and He has saved me.

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His mercy lasts forever.

Now that Lent is over, we return to saying “Alleluia” in the Gospel Acclamation:

Alleluia, alleluia.

Alleluia, alleluia.

You believe in Me, Thomas, because you have seen Me; happy are they who have not seen Me, but still believe!

Alleluia, alleluia.

+ A reading from the holy gospel according to St. John (John **20:19-29**)

The disciples were afraid of the Jewish leaders, and on the evening of that same Sunday they locked themselves in a room. Suddenly, Jesus appeared in the middle of the group. He greeted them saying, "Peace be with you," and showed them His hands and His side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they became very happy. After Jesus had greeted them again, "Peace be with you," He said, "I am sending you, just as the Father has sent Me." Then He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they will be forgiven. But if you don't forgive their sins, they will not be forgiven." Although Thomas, the twin, was one of the twelve disciples, he was not with the others when Jesus appeared to them. So they told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But Thomas said, "First I must see the nail scars in His hands and touch them with my finger. I must put my hand where the spear went into His side. I won't believe unless I do this!" A week later the disciples were together again. This time Thomas was with them. Jesus came in while the doors were still locked and stood in the middle of the group. He greeted the disciples, "Peace be with you," and then said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands! Put your hand into my side. Stop doubting and have faith!" Thomas replied, "You are my Lord and my God!" Jesus said, "Thomas, do you have faith because you have seen Me? The people who have faith in me without really seeing me are the ones who are really blessed!" The gospel of the Lord.

Remember that a big difference between the apostles in the reading from the Acts and the apostles from the gospel reading is that in the gospel the apostles had not yet received the Holy Spirit. So they were still locked in that upper room, and this time they were afraid of those same Jewish authorities that didn't seem to bother them while they were on Solomon's Porch. But they locked themselves in that room because they were very sad and confused about what had gone on since Jesus' arrest only three days earlier. Put yourself in their position. They had just had Passover supper with their Master whom they had been following for the past three years. Then suddenly He was arrested, tortured, and died on the cross. And now His body had disappeared. You and I know what happened because it has been explained to us, but they didn't get it yet. Then just like that, even though the door was locked, there was Jesus sitting among them. That must have made them pretty happy for the first time in the past three days. But they were still pretty confused.

So Jesus said, "Peace be with you." What did Jesus mean when He said, "Peace be with you," to the disciples in that locked room? They were sad and afraid and nervous and anxious. He wanted to take away their fears and anxiety. It is the same with us. Jesus wants *us* to have peace, peace from our fears, peace from our struggles, peace from fighting, peace from all of our problems and worries. Remember that during the Mass after the Our Father and before Communion the priest says, "Jesus said, 'I leave you peace. *My* peace I give you.'" Jesus wants us to have and share this peace of the risen Christ. Then the priest says, "Let us exchange a sign of that peace." And we turn to the people next to us and wish them peace.

Finally in the gospel we read about the apostle, doubting Thomas. He missed out on Jesus' first appearance. And he was blamed for doubting the disciples who claimed to see Jesus after He rose from the dead. But the disciples themselves doubted Mary Magdalen when she came and told them His body was not in the grave. More importantly, they told Thomas that they saw Jesus and He breathed on them and told them to receive the Holy Spirit. So Thomas could have figured, what were they still doing locked up in the upper room if they had seen the Lord and received the Holy Spirit?

Even though it is not part of today's readings, the short book of St. James can help us understand why Thomas might have had such a hard time believing the other disciples. St. James discusses how faith without works is dead. In fact, he is so determined to convince his reader that faith needs works he actually says, "Do you want proof, you ignoramus, that faith without works is useless?" (Jas 2:20) Then he uses Abraham and Rahab from the Old Testament as examples (which is the topic of a different discussion). The point here is that the other disciples in telling Thomas the story about Jesus' appearance were all talk and no action. The point of the gospel story is not only what Jesus told Thomas, "The people who have faith in me without really seeing me are the ones who are really blessed!" A second point is that the faith we have in Jesus is just as unconvincing to anyone else if we do not live a life of faith, if we do not live like we believe in the risen Jesus, if we are not joyful, if we are not generous, if we are not thankful, if we are not happy at Easter.

So this famous gospel reading is full of lessons. *Jesus wants us to have and share the peace He offers us.* The reading from the Acts of the Apostles shows us what life was like for the early Christians who were at peace with each other and with their faith in Jesus. *We are "the ones who are really blessed" because we have faith in Jesus,* even though we will not be able to touch Him in this life like his disciples did when He appeared to them in the locked room. *And it is important that we show everyone, by how we live our lives, the peace that we have that comes from the faith that we have in Jesus.*

These, girls and boys, are the lessons about peace and faith in today's readings. Talk to your parents about it.

The Second Sunday of Easter, 2022
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