

Sunday Homily

2nd SUNDAY OF EASTER

19 APRIL 2020

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK II

“Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

Illustration

“Look at Joan. She weighed 280 pounds and had tried every diet under the sun. But after only three months on our new sensible-eating plan she is down to an incredible 140 pounds. Joan says she is now full of confidence and her whole outlook on life has changed.”

“Dave is only thirty and already his hair has turned grey. But thanks to our new formula hair colorant, Dave has not just regained his natural hair colour, but has found that women who used to ignore him now pay him a lot more attention.”

A lot of advertisements we see these days use this “before and after” format to sell their products. Pictures don’t lie, we tell ourselves, and there’s nothing so convincing as having the evidence of dramatic change put before our eyes to make us believe the extravagant claims of the advertisers.

Gospel Teaching

The theme of today’s readings could be described as being an early version of this type of “before and after” selling. In the Gospel, Thomas is the ultimate hard-bitten consumer, unwilling to believe anyone’s claims, even his friends’, unless he has the evidence in front of him. Jesus risen from the dead? He won’t believe it unless he can see it with his own eyes, in fact unless he can feel the very wounds of the cross on Christ’s body. And, of course, Jesus duly obliges: “Put your finger here... Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.” Faced with such overwhelming evidence, Thomas does indeed believe.

But there is another striking “before and after” image presented to us in today’s readings. John tells us that “the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews.” But the picture of what happened after that, once Jesus had given the gift of the Holy Spirit, is totally different. The description of the early Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles is light years away from the frightened, disheartened, tiny group of disciples huddled together in that upper room. Once the Spirit is given, all fear is gone. The disciples preach openly, the community grows in numbers, they are full of praise and courage.

And the second reading goes even further. It also describes a “before” and an “after”. The “before” is this present life of faith, which gives us joy and hope but is also tinged with trials and suffering. Peter promises that there will be an “after” – once this time of testing is over – when we can come into the inheritance promised to us, an eternal reward that can never be spoiled, the salvation of our souls.

Application

The readings today are not simply descriptions of past events, of what happened to Thomas and that early Christian community. They are paradigms, models of what God can do to us in our individual lives and in our parish and religious communities. The Lord takes away our fear and replaces it with his peace. He fills us with his Spirit so that we too can form a community that is faithful to the teaching of the apostles, centred on the breaking of bread and prayer, and where all members care for each other’s needs. He sends us out, with a mission, his mission, and he promises to work with us – through “miracles and signs” – to confirm the message he gives. We are simply called to make that leap of faith, as Thomas did.

This is no fairy story or wishful thinking: this is the common experience of Christians throughout the centuries. The community Peter wrote to didn’t live in some romantic Christian idyll. They knew real danger, real pain, even death for the sake of their faith in Christ. But he reminds them – and us – that, no matter what trials we face, real faith is possible: “You did not see him, yet you love him.” In other words, as Jesus tells Thomas: “Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

We each face the trials of life and of faith in our own particular ways – perhaps we face rejection or hostility because of our faith; perhaps our faith has cost us in terms of career or friends; perhaps our cross is that of physical illness, mental anguish, grief, poverty or loneliness. Whatever our trials, Peter encourages us to take heart, to keep our faith alive, to remember the hope we now have, and to look forward to that glorious “after” which awaits all those who remain faithful.