

2nd Sunday of Easter (A)
(Acts 2:42-47 / John 20:19-31)
23.04.2017
Closed Doors

In the Gospels closed doors are not always a bad thing. We remember Jesus' injunction to "go into our room and shut the door and pray to our Father who is in secret" (Mt 6:6).

In fact, first time round, it is understandable to see the disciples behind closed doors; they are just under the shock of the death of their master, they are afraid that they might undergo similar treatment at the hands of the Romans and the Jewish authorities. The disciples are clearly living on the survival mode.

What is less understandable is to read that, a week later, after Jesus has said to them "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit", they are still behind closed doors!

We are not referring here only to the doors of the room where they are hiding but also to the doors of their hearts and minds which are closed to Jesus' words of reassurance, empowerment and sending out on mission.

What is amazing is that in the passion narratives of Mark and Matthew we are told that a great stone was keeping the door of Jesus' tomb (Mt 24:60; Mk 15:46). And we know that this stone was rolled away. No closed or locked door could have prevented the outburst of love and life in the Resurrection. There was no cross, no death, no grave, no stone nor door which could have held the Risen Lord captive.

Earlier in John's Gospel, Jesus told his disciples: "I am the door. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: he will go freely in and out" (10:9). Here the emphasis is on the fact that, in the body of Christ, in the Church, we are free to go in and out. Following our Lord and Shepherd, no fears should retain us, holding us prisoners behind closed doors.

The fact is that the disciples gathered together behind closed doors means a lot to us today. The disciples are the Church, they are an image of our Christian communities in the 21st century. And Jesus says to us, as he said to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me so am I sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit".

For us there are two fears, not necessarily exclusive of one another, which may be at work at the present moment: we may keep the doors closed either because we are afraid to go out or because we are afraid that people may come in.

What Jesus says to the disciples is not only addressed to our Christian brothers and sisters who are legitimately afraid to go out in Egypt, Syria, North Korea, and unfortunately in so many other countries. Jesus' words are also addressed to us. Here and now, we are sent out as witnesses to the Good News of the Resurrection. In its very essence, the Church is missionary or it is not Church at all.

We may be afraid to face challenges, rejection, and scorn. Yet as St Peter reminds us, we have to "be ready to make our defence to anyone who demands from us an account of the hope that is in us" and to do it "with gentleness and reverence" (1P 3:15-16).

The danger is for us to become like tombs holding prisoner a life and a love which need to be shared so that they may spread throughout the world. On this Mercy Sunday, we are reminded that it is our duty to be merciful to all men and women, and the best way for us

to be merciful is certainly to show people, by our words and by deeds, how much they are loved by the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To go out from the tomb, to open the door wide, to be missionaries is not an option for us, these things belong to our identity as Christians. We owe all this to our brothers and sisters who are persecuted and risk their lives every day for the sake of Christ and his Gospel.

As Eugene Peterson puts it we are called “to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth”, we are called “to be light bringing out the God-colors in the world” (Mt 5:13-14).

This is our mission and this is why we cannot settle for a form of Christianity which keeps us locked behind closed doors. Pope Francis warns us: “Never let us involve ourselves in things that, in the long run, bring us to become closed in ourselves. In this closedness, there is neither the fruit nor the freedom of the Holy Spirit” (Morning Meditation, 27.04.2013).

The second fear consists in locking the door so that nobody may enter in. This is a great temptation for our Christian communities. We favour sameness over diversity, we feel secure when we know everybody, when the cohesion of the group is stable and visible. New-comers and new ideas are often perceived as a threat to the unity of the group.

The doors may not be completely closed. However the criteria for entry may be so demanding and the requirements for cleanliness and conformity so strict that few are able – and more are unwilling – to cross the threshold of the doors of our communities.

It is vital for the life of our communities and for our witness to the world that we exercise genuine hospitality, that all feel welcome and respected. The inner doors of our hearts and minds, the doors of our Christian buildings, the doors of our countries should be open to all those who come. The Spirit of discernment and generosity, of wisdom and mercy is our strength. We have nothing to fear. In no way should we allow fears, those fears instilled by terrorism or inner insecurity, to keep us prisoners and to prevent us from being faithful to our vocation.

In the Acts of the Apostles, three times, we are told that the Lord opened the gates of the prison where the apostles were held captive (5:19; 12:10; 16:26). During this Easter season, let us ask the Lord to open the doors that hold us prisoners.

May his Spirit lubricate the hinges of the doors of our hearts so that we may be free from bitterness, anger, fears, despair and all that hinders us from relating to all men and women with trust, respect and courage.