

2nd Sunday of Easter (A)
(Ac 2:42-47 / John 20:19-31)
16.04.2023
Feast of the Divine Mercy

Dear brothers and sisters,

In today's gospel passage, the Risen Lord appears to his disciples a first time on the evening of Resurrection's Day and a second time eight days later. We have here the beginning of a template which the Church still follows today; namely that the time and place par excellence to meet with the Risen Lord is on Sundays when the community of believers comes together to celebrate the memorial of the Lord's resurrection. Here the Risen Lord makes himself present to the community in a very powerful way which obviously does not exclude the many other ways by which he reveals himself. In our Sunday Eucharistic celebrations, we praise the Lord, listen to his Word, intercede with him, and share his body and blood in the sacrament.

The Risen Lord appeared to his disciples when they were gathered together in a room. It can happen that we dream and say: How wonderful it would have been for us to have been among those disciples, those holy men; it would have been easier for us to believe! Perhaps things were not as simple as that! Let us reflect upon what really happened in the encounters the Risen Lord had with the disciples. These disciples were not only those who had followed Jesus from the beginning of his ministry with enthusiasm and generosity of heart, but also those who had abandoned him when he needed them most. We read in the gospel (Mt 26:56) that, when Jesus was arrested, his disciples deserted him, ran away and left him alone. We remember that Peter denied Jesus three times and Judas Iscariot betrayed his Master. It is something well accepted by most biblical scholars that one of the greatest sufferings of Jesus in his passion was his loneliness, the abandonment of his disciples. Jesus would have benefited so much to have had the comfort of the presence and the prayer of his disciples during his passion.

It is to the disciples who abandoned him during his passion that the Risen Lord appears. He offers them his mercy and shows his wounds to them. We understand now why this Second Sunday of Easter was chosen to celebrate Divine mercy.

This is good news for us. We know to what extent we are sinners. We know the weight of our guilt and shame. We know the little faith we have. We know our weaknesses and our lukewarmness. We know the infidelities of our hearts, our failures in the Lord's regard. The Risen Jesus also knows all this. But it is to us, sinners as we are, that He, the Christ, appears. He comes to meet with us; he looks at us, his eyes looking into our eyes and says to us: "Peace be with you".

"Peace be with you". These words of the Risen Lord come back three times in today's gospel passage. Let us reflect on the three times Jesus uses these words. In them, we will discover three fruits of the apparitions of the Risen Lord in our lives at any time.

The first time, we read: "The Risen Lord came and stood among his disciples. He said to them: 'Peace be with you' and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy".

The Risen Lord brings joy to those he encounters. When on the evening of Easter the disciples see Jesus for the first time, they were filled with guilt and shame for their betrayal, their desertion of Jesus when he needed their presence most, but paradoxically they rejoice. We can ask ourselves: From where does their joy come? The disciples rejoice because, as they see the face of Jesus and hear his greeting 'peace be with you', they are led to turn their attention away from themselves to focus on Jesus. When Jesus looks at them, he does not do so with a regard of judgement and condemnation but with a regard of mercy. His merciful presence attracts them to him. Jesus does not reproach them for what they have done to him. He shows them his usual kindness. Christ's merciful regard revives the disciples and fills their hearts with the peace they had lost. His merciful regard reconciles them by a grace of unmerited forgiveness.

The Risen Jesus brings the same joy to us when we experience his forgiveness. When we have sinned and feel filled with shame like the disciples on Easter evening, when we think that nothing can be done to repair the damage done by our sins, this is precisely the moment when the Lord does everything. He gives us his peace; He makes us feel the embrace of his mercy. It is the joy of receiving pardon and peace. His mercy raises us up without humiliating us. This is the joy that the sacrament of reconciliation brings. It is the joy of a broken relationship restored. It is the joy of the opening up of a future in what was a situation of hopelessness.

The Risen Jesus repeats the words "Peace be with you" a second time and adds: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you". He then gives the disciples the Holy Spirit to make them ministers of reconciliation: "Those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven". The Risen Lord sends on mission those he encounters. Not only do the disciples receive mercy; they become ministers of the mercy they themselves have received; they receive this power as a pure gift of grace, based nonetheless on their experience of having been forgiven themselves.

The Risen Jesus asks us to be his witnesses in the world with his words: "Peace be with you". We have received peace. We have to extend this gift to others in the small ordinary ways that each day brings. We are called to be ministers of reconciliation at home, in our families, in our communities and at work. We can ask ourselves: Do we try to diffuse conflicts, to bring forgiveness in place of anger, peace in place of resentment? Do we try to avoid hurting others by not gossiping about them which is a practice that always kills?

The Risen Jesus is shown to have said "peace be with you" a third time, when, eight days later, he appears again to his disciples and strengthens the wavering faith of Thomas. Thomas wants to see and touch the Risen Jesus' body. Jesus is not offended by Thomas' disbelief. On the contrary, He comes to Thomas with the words: "Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe". The Risen Lord confirms our faith. Jesus understands Thomas' difficulty. Jesus does not treat Thomas with harshness and Thomas deeply moved by this kindness journeys from being an unbeliever to belief making the simplest and finest confession of faith: "My Lord and my God".

Let us listen to the Risen Jesus murmuring to each one of us: "Peace be with you". Let us welcome his mercy. Let us allow his mercy to touch and transform us, filling our hearts with joy, making of us ministers of the gospel, and strengthening our wavering faith.