Lectio Divina – 2nd Sunday of Easter Year A

Contexts

John’s Gospel – in brief

* **Structure of John’s Gospel**

**1:1-18:** **Prologue** – An introduction to and summary of the career of the incarnate Word.

**1:19-12:50: Part One: The Book of Signs**: the Word reveals himself to the world and to his own, but they do not accept him.

**Chapter 6** – Jesus, the Bread of Life is right in the middle of The Book of Signs – a central text in more ways than one!

**13:1-20:31: Part Two: The Book of Glory**: To those who accept him, the Word shows his glory by returning to the Father in death, resurrection and ascension. Fully glorified, he communicates the Spirit of life.

**21:1-25: Epilogue**: Galilean resurrection appearances and second conclusion.

* It is the only Gospel to call Jesus “God”.
* Purpose of Gospel is so that those who follow Jesus might have the kind of faith that would give them eternal life, namely, the faith that Jesus was God’s only Son, possessing God’s own life and had come into the world from above that people might be given that life (and thus be begotten by God) and become God’s children. (Raymond Brown SS)
* Jesus is ‘The Bread of Life’ who feeds, nourishes and sustains the children of God.

John 20:19-31 – things to notice

* It is the evening of the day of resurrection – the first day of the week is a reference to the day we now know as Sunday.
* This Gospel is in 2 parts: The appearance to the disciples (note, not just the Apostles) and Jesus’ appearance to Thomas – 2 separate but related and linked stories.

**Part 1: Appearance to the disciples**

* The disciples are gathered in a room with closed doors ‘for fear of the Jews’ – this does not necessarily mean that any Jews are obviously threatening them. It probably only means that the disciples themselves were afraid of what *might* happen.
* Jesus comes and stands among them – he does not enter through the door.
* His first words are: Peace and he shows them his hands and side (proof that he really is Jesus)
* The disciples are overjoyed – note there is no hint of doubt (as in Luke) or hesitation.
* Jesus commissions the disciples: “As the Father sent me, so I am sending you…” The disciples are now to represent Jesus to the world.
* He breathes on them and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit”. Note the difference in Luke where the Holy Spirit will not be given for 40 more days.
* “For those who sins you forgive they are forgiven….” It is not easy to understand this verse exactly since the Gospel of John only ever speaks of sin as unbelief. This should not be understood as the power to forgive sins being entrusted to a priest in the sacrament of Reconciliation. “This ‘power’ of forgiveness is probably expressed in the bestowing of the Sprit on those who believe as a result of the disciples mission and who join the community, rather than a process of dealing with Christians who have committed sin (as in Matthew 18:19)” – Jerome Biblical Commentary.

**Part 2: Appearance to Thomas**

* Thomas demands proof.
* 8 days later the disciples are together again in the house & Thomas is with them.
* As in the appearance to the disciples, the doors are once more closed, but Jesus comes in.
* Once again Jesus’ greeting is: ”Peace be with you”.
* Jesus invites Thomas to believe – “Put your finger here… doubt no longer, but believe”.
* Thomas confession of faith (belief) – “My Lord and my God” – is also the high point of the Gospel’s Christology – the crucified and risen Jesus is Lord and God.
* Thomas is reprimanded for asking for proof – he should have believed the word spoken by the others present at the first appearance.
* Blessed are the ones who have not seen and yet believed – all those who faith is grounded in the presence of the Lord through the Holy Spirit – a message of comfort to those believers who were not historical witnesses to the Jesus event.
* The final lines of this Sunday’s Gospel appear to be the original conclusion of John’s Gospel. Chapter 21 was appended later.
* It speaks of many other sings done by Jesus, but the ones recorded here in this Gospel are given so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah (the Christ) and the Son of God, and that in believing this, you may life through his name (eternal life).

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

The great Easter Feast of last Sunday begins a fifty day celebration of the Resurrection in the life of the Church concluding with the feast of Pentecost in six weeks’ time.

Each Sunday the first reading is from the Acts of the Apostles. These readings tell the story of the first group of believers: their life and faith, how they witnessed to the risen Lord, and the hardships and struggles they endured.

The second reading each Sunday is from the first Letter of St Peter (though it is unlikely that St Peter himself wrote the letter). The letter is addressed to Christian converts from paganism about the year 65AD encouraging them to stand firm in the faith they have received in spite of being persecuted.

Year A Easter Gospels

The Gospel of each Sunday is always from John except for the 3rd Sunday and the feast of the Ascension.

Easter Sunday: Christ, risen from the dead

2nd Sunday: Jesus appears to the disciples & to Thomas

3rd Sunday: Jesus and the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke)

4th Sunday: Jesus, the bearer of life in all its fullness

5th Sunday: Christ, the way, truth & life

6th Sunday: Promise of the Spirit

Ascension: Jesus commission the eleven (Matthew)

Pentecost: Receive the Holy Spirit.

The second Sunday of Easter is the ‘octave’ of the feast.

The first reading speaks about the first community of believers and how the influence of their lives and prayer affected those around them and brought about many cures.

In the second reading St Peter’s words are warm, joyful and encouraging. The cause of our joy as Christians is that we are re-born in Christ as beloved sons and daughters of a great and merciful God.

In today’s Gospel reading there are two stories of transformation through encounter with the risen Jesus.

Firstly, Jesus appears to a group of frightened and bewildered disciples hiding in a room. His first words are, ‘Peace be with you’. Fear and bewilderment turn into joy as the disciples recognise the presence of the Risen Jesus with them. But that’s not all. He then sends them out to be missionaries of peace and forgiveness. In receiving the Holy Spirit they are transformed from a group of frightened people, hiding in a room to bold proclaimers of God’s love and mercy.

We already know that fear breeds isolation and loneliness. We are living with that each day. While taking necessary steps to keep ourselves and each other safe, we are trying not to let our hearts go into lockdown, too. There is something inherently good in human nature. People are finding new ways to care for each other. Like top-class restaurants turning out hundreds of meals for poor, elderly or isolated people. There are many other examples of people transforming fear and bewilderment into moments of hope and joy. Do we not also recognise the presence of the risen Jesus in these saving actions?

The second story in today’s Gospel is the one we all know as *doubting* Thomas, though, really, it should be known as *believing* Thomas - doubt is only the beginning of the story.

Jesus doesn’t scold or rebuke Thomas. If Thomas is looking for proof, he has only to touch Jesus to see he is real. But Thomas doesn’t do that. It is his personal encounter with Jesus which transforms him from doubter to believer.

It is yet another Gospel reminder that faith is not about believing with our minds or in looking for proof. It is found only in our living relationship with Jesus.

Perhaps these extraordinary days give us a bit more time just to sit and chat with Jesus, to recognise him already present in our hearts, to allow our fears and doubts to be overcome by love, to find new, creative ways of transforming the darkness of these days into light, peace and joy for others.

May the new life we celebrate over the next fifty days bring us the creativity of Spirit we need to be the living heart of God in our world today.

The stories about the faith and intense missionary activity of the early church challenge us in our own day to ask ourselves about how we reach out to and evangelise the community in whose midst we live. We do not exist primarily for ourselves who are already in the community. We exist primarily for those who are not.

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