

Second Sunday of Easter (John 20, 19-31)

Today's Gospel tells us how the apostles locked themselves in the upper room "for fear of the Jews." I think they were also afraid of Jesus because they frustrated Him. They gave Him empty promises. They left Him for dead. Locking themselves in the room showed their awkward immaturity. But for all their defensiveness, they cannot keep out the pressing love of the Risen Lord, He appears in their midst and His first words were "Peace be with you." What a relief must have circulated the room. There was no mention of chastisement at all. Following the Lord's peace-greeting, He showed them His scarred hands. His first peace-message is repeated a second time and then Jesus told them to do for others what He had done for them- by being merciful and harboring no grudges.

To be Christ-like can mean a variety of things but perhaps being peaceful, merciful, and forgiving comes as close as any. We are not only expected to re-tell the mercy of Jesus but also to demonstrate it in our personal conduct by loving our "enemies"- those who have hurt us, those who have been unfaithful and abandoned us in our times of urgent needs. But Jesus insists that we forgive from the heart. "How is this possible?" we might ask. How can we forgive someone who betrayed us? How can we forgive someone who ruined our family? Loving or forgiving our "enemies" does not mean pretending that they are not such bad fellows after all. It does not mean we forget. Some wounds are so deep that they leave permanent scars. Forgiveness means the refusal to ever surrender to feelings of hatred.

There is much pain and strife in the world because of a lack of forgiveness. This may be true in our own little world. If we could only be more forgiving to our spouse, mother-in-law, brother or sister-in law, or a neighbor, things would be different. Anyone who refuses to forgive will never experience the joy and peace of God's forgiveness.

IT'S NOT EASY TO BECOME A CATHOLIC. FOR CATHOLICISM IN THIS CONTEXT IS EXCLUSIVELY FOR ADULTS ONLY!

Then the story of Thomas comes into the fore. *We learned that Thomas was part of the apostolic group, but he is also a distinct independent self.* He cannot be loyal to the group while being disloyal to his own inner self. That would render his loyalty worthless. *For Thomas honesty is more important than loyalty.* So he refused to become part of this company of believers, for it is not enough for him to shelter in a faith that he cannot credit for himself. He may want to believe, yearn to accept as true what others say, but his wish cannot struggle into faith. *The insistent honesty of Thomas is what makes him doubt.* For Thomas to say he believed would be play-acting and make-believe. It would be to make a religion out of role-playing, agreeing to act out a part that was expected of him but to which he could not bring his real self. *For Thomas it is important what he is asked to believe in, more important than belonging to the company of believers.*

Thomas encourages us to think, probe, and question. Our faith must be real and sensible to us. To just sit back and nod our heads in agreement to confusing presentations is being very “*unthomistic!*” *If like Thomas we care about what we believe in, that care in time will bring us into the presence of the living Lord.*

Amen.

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