

**2 Easter  
April 11, 2021**

**In the name of God, who in Jesus,  
taught us the meaning of unconditional Love.  
AMEN**

I hope all of you shared in last Sunday's Easter Worship one way or another. And how powerful it was! The music was lovely, including the unforgettable solos. Ted's message was so thoughtful, and best of all, some were able to be here in this wonderful place of love and acceptance; and so many others were able to share from their homes. It truly was a glorious Easter morning!

And now, today: Did you notice...In all our readings today we sense a strong presence of community. For example, in the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we glimpse the almost ecstatic dawning of the Christian community in the days after the Pentecost experience where the Holy Spirit came among the followers of Jesus and on thousands of others. And in the Psalm, we have vivid images of the value of unity. // In the second Reading, John writes to a close community that draws its life from the life and light of Christ. And, right here I think of this community of St. Cyprian's, drawing its light and life from Jesus Christ. Or as Fr.Ted would say, "Taking seriously what Jesus took seriously!" And then in the Gospel, which we have just heard, we are with the very first community of followers of Jesus Christ, who are gathered, fearfully at first, but then experience the presence of the risen Lord among them.

So, let's take a deeper look at today's Gospel. This event in the so called Upper Room is described in such a way that the whole scene becomes vivid and immediate for us. The mention of "evening" ... and "doors" ... and "locked for fear" points us to a group of people who are basically in shock. Their dream is ended, their leader has been killed as a criminal, their hopes for the future are shattered. They are huddled in hiding, fearful- that they also may be discovered and killed. Notice how we read again that "the doors were shut." Once again, we are reminded of the self-induced imprisonment of the earliest disciples, the very state from which the Risen Lord wishes to release them.

And *then*, without warning, the very one they mourn is again among them. And as our Gospel conveys, there is no hint of denial about what has happened to him. The Gospel said, "He showed them his hands and his side". And, as we can only imagine, the disciples are utterly transformed! The Gospel says: "They *rejoiced* when they saw the Lord." And, indeed He calls them forth...into action, commitment and involvement...out from their hiding and into God's world, where they are so needed to spread the Good News of God made known to them in Jesus.

Jesus now does something that we may all too easily take for granted or simply gloss over. He offers them his Peace! ///// Oh, may WE never take that for granted... because... Jesus also offers *us* His Peace!" No matter what, no matter where"! //// Then he says, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

So, let us think of how God has sent Jesus. He was sent into the world of struggles, ambiguities, dangers, challenges, dreadful injustices. In other words, the sending of Jesus is the very *opposite* of what these disciples are doing in this locked room! Jesus went everywhere he felt called to go. They, ...in sharp contrast, have made themselves prisoners of their own fears. Our Lord reached out to others; they are avoiding all contact with others. //// And, here he is, saying to them, "I send you." Jesus does not dismiss

them or find them unworthy because of their fears, or because of their inability to rally in the face of the recent life-changing events. He still regards them as worthy instruments of his purposes and gives them the greatest gift of all...he gives them his own Peace to strengthen and empower them. /// That same Jesus offers US his Peace...and his strength...AND his call to us to GO...be his hands and his voice, quite especially now, when we have all been through such an unbelievable year. Jesus is calling. Our God in Jesus is calling to each of us to reach out in his Name! Go, Be the Church in the world! As each one reaches out to another, how much stronger we all are!

Often in Scripture we have learned how God will call someone who will seem utterly unworthy of God's call, or perceive themselves unable to respond to it. Yet, God will still call them to the task set before them. To recognize this pattern in scripture is to find very good news for ourselves. We are not dismissed as inadequate or unworthy for service in God's Holy Plan merely because of our fears, or our many shortcomings...or our own insecurities. Just look at the rather motley crew of the disciples that Jesus called and then sent out. Just think of Peter. Peter who had denied even knowing Jesus. What did Jesus see in Peter? What is it that he perhaps sees in you and me?

I think this is really a message of encouragement to us to offer our time and really whatever we can...for the good of others, for the strengthening of our special St. Cyprian's Community and to continue our mission and outreach beyond our church community. Think how diminished we would be if individuals had not stepped forward this year, to offer what they could for the good of this church and for the good of all those we try to reach out to and care for. And what a range of offerings we have. Some gifts and offerings are more noticeable than some others, but each and every bit offered for others, whether personally known to us or not, actually strengthens the entire community. //

Let's now go back to the well-known story about Thomas and what happened in that Upper Room. Our Gospel tells us that Thomas was not in the room initially; we are not told why. But, when he does join the others, he finds everyone transformed! They cluster around him, toppling over themselves to tell him the unbelievable Good news. But, much to their dismay, Thomas spurns their efforts. Actually, I think this is quite in keeping with Thomas' personality as we have experienced in the past. Thomas is the consummate realist! Look back to the disagreement about whether they should return to Bethany after the news of the death of Lazarus. Thomas knew it was very dangerous for them to do so, and he said so. And now, here in this upper room full of ecstatic voices, Thomas emphatically refuses to believe them. Every deliberate word conveys the tone of his voice. "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails, and my hand in his side, I will not believe." It sounds almost as if Thomas is being deliberately challenging in expressing his conditions for believing. He doesn't think anyone in the room understands where he is coming from. Don't we tend to lash out when we feel that no-one else understands? //

We can only wonder: What was talked about in those first days of the new life of these Jesus followers? What moods swept them? All we know, is that the Lord once again came among them. As before, the appearance is unannounced, utterly unexpected. Notice how we read again that "the doors were shut." Once again we are reminded of the self-induced imprisonment of the early community, the very state from which the risen Lord wishes to release them. And indeed, He calls them *forth...into action*, commitment and involvement...*out* from their hiding and into God's world, where they are so needed to spread the Good News of God made known to them in Jesus. Can we picture ourselves in that Upper Room, in that

Holy moment with Jesus calling those who would follow him, saying to US...I need you/ be not afraid. Go forth from your safe place. Share the Good News of God's Love.

I think this focus on Thomas today gives us a chance to really consider what Easter means to us. It is Thomas, who is immediately addressed, because it is Thomas who is holding back from fully experiencing the joy the others know in the presence of the Lord. Our Lord's words to Thomas are a direct response to Thomas's previously spelled out conditions, that UNLESS he could feel the wounds of Jesus, he would not be fooled/he would not believe! Amazingly, we are not told whether Thomas even reached out to touch Jesus, but we DO know that he burst out with the exclamation, "My Lord and My God!" ////

Personally, I have always felt that we are witnessing here the response of a person who is in fact very far from being a doubter! I see Thomas as the very opposite: a deeply committed believer - whose belief has been wounded and broken by the events of the recent days. I see him as the kind of person who, when he makes a commitment to someone or something, makes a total commitment. Think of it: He had committed himself to follow Jesus a couple of years before, and stayed with him through thick and thin. Now his heart is broken by the ghastly death of Jesus. His world has collapsed, and he is determined never to give his heart to anything or anyone again, never to trust life again, never to give his love again. BUT...when our Lord stands in front of him, Thomas is flooded with Love and he is able to give himself totally once more! He WANTS to believe! He is more himself, more complete, as he believes! I don't think Thomas is alone in this.

My prayer for each of us is that no matter what our fears may be, no matter how our doubts have crowded in, no matter how dark the road ahead looks, my prayer is that each of us will have the experience that the early disciples had and WE, yes WE, will rejoice when WE see the Lord and give thanks that he has come among us. Remember Jesus offers US *his* Peace.

Always on the Sunday after Easter Sunday we have the Gospel reading about Thomas ... doubting Thomas, who needs to see before he can believe ... but I think this Gospel is also about us...who also have not seen. Think of what we have been through and imagine what may be ahead. But, focus on how this Gospel message ends ... "There are many things not written ... BUT these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life. These words are written that we may have life and have it abundantly! Right now...not fear...Life!

MYSTICALLY, God has given us the risen Christ, with his arms wide open to invite EVERYONE to share in his gift of Love. He is in our midst now, assuring us once again that Resurrection has overcome crucifixion, forgiveness has overcome sin. Jesus is promising us once again, that in order for all of this to have genuine meaning for our lives, in order for us to sing the Lord's song, dance the music of the Good News, we must accept and embrace the gift to us, his modern- day disciples, THE GIFT of Jesus, his own Peace.

Light *has* overcome darkness. Yes, as Lanny Ballard, our soloist on Easter morning sang: "Then came the morning!"

May the risen Christ be made known to you, in faith, hope, love and His Peace. Happy, Blessed Eastertime!

AMEN