

2nd Sun of Easter (Acts 2:42-47; Jn 20:19-31) 2023

16 April

Begin Again

I wouldn't expect any of you to remember it, but I have now preached on this same second Sunday of Easter for 3 years in a row. In fact, because the first and second readings are quite similar and the gospel for this Sunday never changes, I even considered reusing one of those homilies. Two years ago, I preached on Divine Mercy, but I forgive you if you've forgotten. And last year was about the Apostle Thomas, but I doubt that any of you remember that one either. Nonetheless, in the spirit of the Easter season, I decided to approach the readings from a fresh perspective. This week, the week after Easter, offers another opportunity for a new homily and a new beginning.

Consider the case of the earliest Christians as described in today's reading from Acts of the Apostle. No doubt the Apostles and first disciples of Jesus would have been dealt a severe setback with the execution of their leader. Their hearts must have been broken by the sight of their rabbi hanging from the cross. During his ministry, Jesus had challenged or broken many of the Jewish traditions as well as Pharisees' interpretations of Jewish Law. Those first Christians could have easily felt abandoned and scattered but they refused to become a broken people. In our reading from Acts, we hear about a joyful society that held all things in common. A community devoted to the teachings of Jesus and to the celebration of what we would come to call the sacraments. We are told that they ate their meals with exultation and praise, and their community thrived and it grew. And continued to grow, even in the face of Roman persecution. Confronted with the death of the man they called Messiah, Jesus' followers regrouped and began anew.

There were, no doubt, major differences between the pre-Easter and post-Easter followers of Jesus. The earlier group had most likely had some first hand experience of Jesus. Perhaps they heard one of his sermons or witnessed one of his miracles. Maybe they only knew him as an enemy as portrayed by the Pharisees. Regardless of the circumstance, they chose to embrace the risen Lord. Even the human Jesus that the Apostles had once followed throughout Galilee was forever changed by his glorious Passion. Jesus no longer walked among them as an ordinary man but is now simultaneously with God through his ascension and with his Apostles in his resurrected self. He has become the true mediator between the human and divine. The bridge that connects the death of the old ways with the promise of everlasting life in the new covenant. A

covenant sealed with his blood. The post Easter Jesus still bore the scars of his execution, but his heavenly body no longer had a need for doors. And his mere presence provided peace of mind and heart during a time of chaos and fear. The crucified Jesus did not fade away into the annals of history. Rather, he began his father's work anew. Meeting with his followers on multiple occasions and pointing toward the new beginning that we know as the Catholic Church.

The first Easter proved to be a pivotal time for Jesus and for the first Christians - it changed them both. I wonder if our pre-Easter and post-Easter selves have changed in any particular way? Did our personal Lenten observances bring us individually closer to Christ in any way? If so, that's great. Keep up those good practices moving forward. On the other hand, maybe our prayers, fasting and almsgiving proved to be more perfunctory or obligatory than refreshing? Perhaps our participation in the Triduum faltered or our various family dysfunctions reared their ugly heads and detracted from our Easter celebrations. While surely disappointing, there is no reason for regret or self condemnation. Living in our world today, surrounded by violence, immorality, suffering and poverty, it can be very difficult to think that through his resurrection, Jesus defeated sin and evil. It can be equally difficult for us to recognize or even imagine that the Risen Lord always remains by our sides. Many of us, despite our prayers and church going ways, still – at least from time to time- still feel distant from God, and like Thomas in our Gospel, even doubt. During these times of struggle, it is all the more important for us to take positive, concrete actions that hopefully renew our relationships with Christ.

This year's Easter Sunday has passed on the calendar. However, we have just joined our Church on a 50 day celebration of Easter that concludes with Pentecost. These 50 days give us the opportunity for a do-over, or in the case of positive experiences a chance to do-again. Day after day, as well as in season and out, we have an opportunity to profess with our words and actions that Jesus is our Lord and our God. Everyday offers an occasion to grow closer to God in prayer and participation in the sacraments. Every day is a day for God's divine mercy, and every day holds the possibility of a new beginning and the chance for each of us to become a new Easter creation.