

The Second Sunday of Easter  
April 7, 2013  
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## From Belief to Mission

*Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

Today's Gospel reading from St. John (20:19-31) is always read on this Second Sunday in Easter. We know the story well. Yet John's account of the risen Lord Jesus appearing on the evening of the first Easter Day and, then, appearing again a week later, contains several teachings for our reflection.

First, John shares with us two of his four stories about the risen Christ. The first appearance story in John was read in many Churches last Sunday, "*Early on the first day of the week...*" (20:1) Mary Magdalene discovered the empty tomb. She told Peter and John. They both ran to the tomb and saw that Jesus' body was not there. As Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, Jesus appeared to her and spoke to her. She went to the disciples and told them, "*I have seen the Lord.*"

He appears again that night, and, then, one week later. Next Sunday we will hear John's fourth and last appearance story, Jesus in Galilee on the beach as the disciples return from a night of fishing. John wants us to reflect upon how Jesus was the same, but different after the Resurrection. Mary and the disciples didn't recognize him at first. Only gradually did they come to see that Jesus had been transformed, risen from the dead. He bore the wounds of the crucifixion. He ate and drank with them. They heard his voice. They saw his risen body. This is a great mystery. Jesus is the same, yet changed. He reveals a new physical and spiritual reality.

John also wants us to realize that the risen Lord "commissions" his disciples on the first Easter night. Jesus says, "*Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you...*" These are the two most important little words, "*as...so.*" Jesus used them on the night before his death when he told the disciples, "*As I have loved you, so you must love one another...*" (13:34). This is the "*new commandment.*"

Jesus "*breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit...'*" For St. John, Easter and Pentecost go together, the Spirit is given on the day of resurrection as the disciples are commissioned to go out into the world sharing God's love and peace. Luke tells us about the Feast of Pentecost when the Spirit filled thousands 50 days after Easter Sunday (Acts 2). For John it begins on the first night as the disciples gradually realize the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection.

John also wants us to remember how the "*breath*" of God swept across the "*formless void and darkness*" at the beginning of the Creation (Genesis 1:2). The Greek word for breath and wind is the same for Spirit. Easter is a second creation. John begins his Gospel with the same words as at the start of the *Bible*, "*In the beginning...*" The risen Christ begins a new creation as the disciples are commissioned to go into all the world.

And, now, lastly, we get to Thomas. Thomas represents us. Thomas represents the Church. We all move from not understanding, not believing to understanding and believing. What a joy

to be able to baptize two infants today. Their parents and godparents will help them to grow in understanding the meaning of Easter. They will help these little girls to know and to love Jesus. It will take years!

John probably wrote this story 50 or more years after Jesus' resurrection. John may have been the very last person still living to have known Jesus as Rabbi; to have travelled from Galilee to Jerusalem with him; to witness the crucifixion; to see the risen Jesus during the 40 days he appeared before ascending to heaven.

John uses Thomas' gradual movement from not believing to believing as an encouragement to all those who didn't see these events. "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.*" This is the Church. This is our experience and the experience of those we baptize as infants. And, then, in believing we can carry Christ's mission to the world.

What makes Thomas' experience particularly powerful is that the tradition of the early Church tells us that Thomas was the one who travelled farthest to share the mission of Christ's love. Thomas went all the way to India. Christians in India to this day consider Thomas the founder of their Church. "*As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*"

*Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

Acts 5:27-32  
Revelation 1:4-8  
John 20:19-31