

2nd Sunday of Easter Year B 2024

Biblical Reflections in the Readings,

Acts of the Apostles 4:32-35 1st Letter of John 5:1-6 Gospel John 20:19-31

From Fr Kevin Walsh, Sydney, Australia

PREPARE

We invite you to find a comfortable position as you read this reflection. Light a candle if you wish and become aware of your breathing. When you are ready, slowly read the reflection, pause when you are drawn to stop and reflect on what you have read. Write down your thought and feeling to ponder on these later if you wish.

'My Lord and my God'!

It hardly seems a week since we celebrated Easter Sunday! The Scripture Readings during the week have been highlighting the Resurrection appearances of Jesus and also linking them to Pentecost. Today, we are faced with the meaning of faith, as demonstrated by **'Doubting' Thomas**. Maybe we can see something of ourselves in Thomas ... and that may not be such a bad thing. But we'll come to that later!

Unlike Thomas, we haven't seen, but are asked and expected to believe ... at least that's what it looks like on the surface. However, it's not like that at all! We have all the proof that anyone could need, that Jesus is alive and well, and living in us, so long as we ourselves are alive and well - and living in him! We live two thousand years later; Pentecost has happened, and the message of the Gospel, and the Person of Jesus, have been debated and written about in almost every language in the world. What further signs do we want? What further signs do we need?

Faith requires a generous dose of humility, and a large amount of common sense. Whenever we buy a car or undergo surgery; every time we board an aircraft, we are making an act of faith in someone or in something. Without faith, we would all end up doing nothing! I remember many years ago when I was preparing to take my first Vows as a Passionist at the end of the Novitiate, I had doubts galore. I was looking for some kind of proof from God that this was the correct path for me. So, I gingerly went along to the Novice Master, and laid bare my thoughts in this regard. So, he said to me, *'Kevin what kind of percentage of proof are you looking for?'* Not wanting to appear to be too exacting.... I responded by saying... *'Well, maybe 75%'*. He just looked at me with a bit of a smile on his face, and then asked me... *'What percentage did your parents have on their wedding day that this was the right path for them?'* That stopped me in my tracks, and I remember saying: *'well they were in love'*. He then responded to me... *'Are you in love with the Lord?'* *'We can be 100% sure that He is in love with us.'* Then the Novice Master continued by saying to me... *'Go away and think deeply about this for a week, then come back and tell me your thoughts'*. That was one of the most powerful and moving weeks for me. So, like Marriage, Religious Life, Priesthood and with any kind of commitment, if people didn't have faith in themselves - and in each other - through the love that binds them, and a deep faith, and love of the Lord.....no one would make any commitments.

Faith is generally accompanied by doubt. Where there is certainty, there is no need for faith. Jesus compares faith to a tiny grain of mustard seed that continues to germinate and grow, eventually becoming a large tree. But just as the mustard seed needs moisture, nutrients, and sunlight to bring it to fullness of life, our faith needs nourishment, light, and the fine mist of life-giving love, to bring it to fullness. Remember the story in the Gospel about the sick man who was lowered down through the roof by his friends, so that Jesus could heal him? Jesus healed the man having '*seen THEIR faith*'. The faith of the community can be so contagious, and can be the means of intercession for others, which can lead to a faith response; this was wonderfully experienced during the Easter Ceremonies 'on line' at the Jesuit Parish, Lavender Bay in Sydney, and our St. Brigid's Passionist Parish at Marrickville here in Sydney., Australia., and I am sure in your own Parish communities throughout the world, even with the restraints of illness, inability to travel etc it is seen daily whenever two or three people gather together in the Christ's name to share life and Eucharist. Through the experience of faith, we get **insight**; that is, the God-given grace **to see** the saving hand of God at work within life-situations, Liturgies, and prayerful stillness.

Let's get back to the Gospel for today.... Notice that the Easter responsibility in reply to the Lord's Easter peace is Mission....'*As the Father sent me, so I am sending you*' somewhat a daunting and responsible task? But let's not miss out on what Jesus then did to the assembled group.... **He breathed on them!** Now to breathe on someone, you can't do that from a distance....it is an intimate sign of closeness. Who has breathed on you in your life? See, these are times of real closeness. In this action of *breathing*, which incidentally the Father did to Jesus at the moment of His Resurrection. (The Resurrection is about the resuscitation of the sleeping Jesus, by the Father, who then became the Christ of life!) New life is breathed into us, and we become new, at Baptism and Confirmation. In fact, within any experience of Christ in our life; new life is infused into us, and it changes us from timidity to loving boldness. You might like to spend a few moments just checking out those kinds of experiences in your own life, and re visit that Sacramental moment in the broadest meaning of the word. Notice that the '**re-mem-bering**' of it can energise you now as it is brought back to us.... this is a worthwhile Spiritual exercise which can do us all of good as we travel enroute to our Heavenly Home.

Finally, like Thomas, we are all called to enter into the brokenness of Christ in His people today. When we dare to enter into the wounds of God's people, it is then we can say not only from our hearts, but also from every fibre of our being: '**My Lord and My God!**' When this happens, we are truly within the holiness of a sacred moment, which is '**in Christ, it is a Sacramental instant.**'

Caravaggio's famous painting depicts the well-known scene somewhat theatrically. By showing his wounds, Jesus takes away Thomas's incredulity. Thomas does put his hand into the wound, into the Cavity wound, the Tomb, may I say. His doubts vanish when he enters the wound, just as John describes it in his gospel.

John himself is seen on the right. He appears to be sleeping, but that should be regarded as having deep inner thoughts and composure in peace. Food for thought!



3rd Sunday of Easter

Year B 2024

Biblical Reflections in the Readings,

Acts 3:13-15.17-19 1 John 2:1-5 Luke 24:35-48

From Fr Kevin Walsh, Sydney, Australia

PREPARE

We invite you to find a comfortable position as you read this reflection. You may wish to light a candle and open your bible and become aware of your breathing. When you are ready, slowly read the reflection, pause when you are drawn to stop and reflect on what you have read. Write down your thought and feeling to ponder on these later if you wish.

It's an extraordinary fact, but very understandable, that one of our basic attitudes towards God is one of fear. The first time the word 'fear' is mentioned in the Bible is when Adam and Eve sinned. We are told that 'they hid, because they were afraid.' From then on, most contacts with God began with the words 'Fear not; be not afraid.' This was even said to Mary, as it was to the shepherds. It is reckoned that Jesus used this expression several dozen times throughout the gospels.

Today's gospel speaks of the apostles being terribly frightened. This seems strange, as the reason for the fear is the one person who had always been their best friend.

In a way it's sad to see Jesus' pleading with his friends to believe him. He invites them to touch him, to give him something to eat, to examine his hands and his feet. Human nature is so fragile, and so changeable.

Let's rest with the concept of 'touch'! There are lots of instances in the Gospels where Jesus touches someone.....this is a particularly important action because it is a very human way of communication. To speak and touch at the same time is a very connected form of relating. Look at the times when you have been respectively touched by someone else, this action puts the mind and memory into another gear. Its action has more chance of staying with us than just a kind word. In our own lives we use the phrase, 'let's keep in touch' while you are away; meaning, let's reinforce the closeness of our relationship through words in emails, text Messages and pics or even handwritten post cards which reignite the memory of being 'touched.' Staying 'in touch' is what life is all about. In this post Resurrection appearance, we see Jesus inviting his friends to 'touch' him so that they can experience the reality that their friend and companion is now their Lord and is with them and will continue to be with His Body, the Church always.

We are told that, while they still doubted, they were filled with joy and wonder. Jesus spoke to them about the hopes and promises ingrained within Scripture about a time when God would gently intervene in our world by His Word, becoming one of us and how he (Jesus) was fulfillment of this desire of the Father for us. While they still wondered, he commissioned them to continue the task he had begun. In the following of that line, which is not included in today's gospel, he promises that he will send them the Holy Spirit, and they will have a new power within themselves, which will urge them to go out in loving boldness and proclaim that the Kingdom of God is at hand. The Risen Lord initiates the authority for this venture, and He gives them the commission, which is to go out to all sinners proclaiming the Good News! *'There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to me.'*

Finally, in the Gospel for today, the Johannine community inserts a Eucharistic overtone in the text.... namely, *'.....they offered him a piece of grilled fish **and he took and ate** before their eyes.'* This Eucharistic insinuation is coupled with the next part that the Risen Lord *...**'opened their minds to understand the scriptures....'*** The Gospel concludes by saying.....*'**you are witnesses to this.**'*

Now, let's get down to the reality of the *'now'* and be reminded of a couple of profoundly serious elements as followers of Jesus. Firstly, the Risen Lord comes to us in our daily life.... think back to those times when the circumstances that you might have been in was awkward, doubtful, and lacking in hope! Within that situation we often feel deep within us a *'stirring'* which frightens us and yet calms us. That is not the time to be looking to prove the existence of God! We don't need too.... we just know it; we know that the Lord is extremely near to us. We become changed, strengthened and the consequences all makes sense as seen through the lenses of Scripture, which the Lord gently unfolds before us. Our faith=insight, enables us to see the saving hand of God at work in us, and around us. As a result, we become witness to this experience of the Risen Lord.....not just for ourselves but to share with others, through our *'changed/transformed selves*. It all makes sense and is real.

So, let's place ourselves among those disciples within today's Gospel.

Maybe our prayer is:

'I believe, Lord, help my unbelief..

Lord, by your cross and resurrection you have set us free...

Lord, increase my faith,

Lord increase my faith!'

