

**Homily for Sunday, April 19, 2020**

**ENGLISH**

I was recently reminded to pay attention to the First and Second Readings during the Easter Season.

Regarding the First Reading, at all other times of the year it comes from the Old Testament. During the Easter Season we read from the Acts of the Apostles, and usually find ourselves in the company of the Apostles Saints Peter and John.

In the Same way, the Second Reading comes either from the First Letter of Peter, the First Letter of John, or the Book of Revelation, written by Saint John. Peter and John act as our guides through Easter.

Peter, the Rock, the one called to be chief shepherd of God's people. And John, who we all remember by his friendship with Jesus. The two together hold up for us two major themes of our faith in Christ, and two major themes of the Easter Season.

Those are:

Foundation and Friendship;  
correct steadfast dogma and relationship;  
what we believe and who we believe in;  
Church teaching and Church as family.

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We see much through these themes of Foundation and Friendship in the Gospel today.

It starts out on the evening of Easter Sunday, and ends on the Octave of Easter – the eighth day. And Jesus comes both Sundays and He gives so much which draws us deeper into firm belief and closer relationship with the Almighty.

Christ gives - the gift of the Spirit. How many of us are waiting for our Confirmation?

Christ gives – Peace.

And Christ gives His mercy.

And the disciples needed both. We do not have to work hard to remember how much His forgiveness and His peace were needed by the disciples. They had abandoned Christ. They had denied Him. And here Christ was - in His power and glory – victor over sin and death. That must have been a frightening sight. There was much to be sorry for, and to hope He would pardon. And He DOES give Pardon. He Does give forgiveness.

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Christ gives – the power and authority to forgive or retain sins. In His life and ministry He so often told them to give as they had received. He does the same here. Forgiveness is now theirs to share. Divine Mercy is now theirs to administer to others.

And today we are the others who still need that forgiveness and mercy to be given to us.

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I think that is something to spend a few more minutes on. One of the things Catholics are asked, and we Catholics ask ourselves, is, “Why do we HAVE to go to a priest for forgiveness.”

The question is a good one. And it cuts to the heart of what anyone believes, let alone what different religions believe, let alone what different Christians believe, let alone what Catholics believe. The universal question – “Can one be truly and completely forgiven? And if so, how?”

As Christians, we believe Christ’s Cross and Resurrection is the means through which flows the loving reconciliation we have with the Father. With that in mind, the question then becomes, “How do we have access to this flood of grace, this Reconciling love which redeems us?” And part of the Catholic answer has always been that it is through the Sacraments. The power, the grace, the explosive life-changing gift God gives us comes to us like a tidal wave in the activities He has given us to participate in. In Baptism, the Eucharist, and all the others, we encounter the Holy Spirit giving us New Life in Christ.

And that is true of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. How do we know we are forgiven? We go to those who have been entrusted with giving it. In today’s Gospel passage, we are told that - right out of the gate, Christ comes and bestows the Holy Spirit for peace; and that with this peace is the ability to give that peace through forgiveness to others. We do not have to wonder or doubt if God has forgiven us. The Apostles, and their successors the bishops, and all the priests they give this ability to as well, have been given something to give to others. We know that when we hear the words of forgiveness from those authorized to give it, Christ is truly forgiving us.

This is an awesome gift indeed. This is truly divine mercy.

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Just as we need forgiveness and mercy, so we need everything given in the Sacraments.

For instance: One of the priests in our Archdiocese made this observation on Twitter this last week: "Just like the Apostles, we need the Holy Spirit at Confirmation to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ resurrected"

And so, again, Jesus rose to give us what we need.

A couple weeks ago, I came across this quote, attributed to Saint John Paul II: "There is no cross to bear that Christ has not already borne for us, and does not now bear with us..."

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The marks He bears in His hands and side are the witness of His love – and so His victory. It cannot be understood in a worldly way. But it can be held onto, and it can be the way to enter into a deeper relationship with Him. His wounds are the marks of our foundation and our friendship with Him.

And so, going back to our initial words – it is about Foundation and Friendship. In Him we can hold solid, and we can draw closer to Him, and In Him. Happy Easter!