

May 1, 2011- Second Sunday of Easter (A)

Readings for the Second Sunday of Easter (Cycle A):

1. Acts of the Apostles 2.42-47

Psalm 118.2-4, 13-15, 22-24 Response: "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting." (This passage from Ps. 118 is read in all three years, A, B, and C.)

2. Peter 1.3-9

3. John 20.19-31 (This gospel passage is read in all three years, A, B, and C.)

Reflections on the Sunday Gospel Reading

by Bill Hunt

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The traditional symbol for John's Gospel is the eagle. In today's reading John's Gospel soars to its peak with Thomas' magnificent profession of faith in the risen Jesus, "My Lord and my God." From that literary high point Jesus declares happy or blessed "those who have not seen and have believed." What is John's message for us who want "to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?"

John the Evangelist was writing for a generation of Christians born after Jesus' death and resurrection. His listeners were not alive during Jesus' time. None of them had seen the Lord, before or after his resurrection. For them faith *had* to come from hearing. (See Romans 10.17) Yet, many felt that their faith was not as strong, not as valid as that of the original eyewitnesses.

John addresses this concern with his story of the disbelieving Thomas. When the other disciples announced: "We have seen the Lord," Thomas should have believed them. Instead, he insisted on some sort of miraculous personal encounter where he would not only see Jesus but touch and feel him as well.

Many have seen this episode as John's way of affirming the reality of the resurrection by a graphic representation of a body that was touchable and still carrying the wounds of the crucifixion. Actually, the appearance to Thomas confirms not so much the reality of Jesus' risen body as the reliability of the witness of the other disciples. Seeing the risen Lord helps Thomas become what he should have been from only hearing about Jesus' resurrection. Thomas' profession of faith shows that he became a believer. Jesus' gentle rebuke ("do not be unbelieving") suggests that he should have been a believer even before seeing for himself.

Contemporary Christians are in a position similar to Thomas during his week of disbelief. We have heard the Easter proclamation, but we have not seen the Lord. However, John the Evangelist seems to imply that we are even better situated than Thomas was because of the Spirit and the Scriptures.

In John's narrative Thomas was not present to receive the Holy Spirit, but we have received the Spirit in Baptism. Also, earlier in his Gospel after Mary of Magdala, Peter, and the other disciple had visited the empty tomb, John comments, "For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead." We who have received the Spirit are able to re-read the holy books of the People of Israel with new understanding and see how the resurrection of Jesus fits in with God's ways.

Beatitudes are inherently ironic. The fact that "those who have not seen and have believed" are blessed does not imply that we are blessed and Thomas was not. It doesn't even imply that *we* are blessed at all. Rather, it is a challenge to count ourselves among "those" who are blessed by believing. We who have received the great gifts of the Spirit and the Scriptures are called to proclaim our belief in the risen Jesus so that we may have life in his name.

In preparing these remarks I consulted the following works in addition to the biblical texts:

Borg & Crossan 2006 – Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week: A Day-by-Day Account of Jesus's Final Week in Jerusalem* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), pp. 189-216.

Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Gospel according to John (xiii-xxi)*, Volume 29A of the Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 1018-1051.

Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), pp. 280-286.

John J. Pilch, *The Cultural World of Jesus, Sunday by Sunday, Cycle C*. A Liturgical Press Book (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), pp. 70-72.