

2nd SUNDAY OF EASTER, C CYCLE, 2022

Acts 5:12-16 *More & more men & women came to believe in Christ, as they heard the Word & saw many healed.*

Psalm 118 *Give thanks to the Lord who is good, God's mercy endures forever.*

Rev 1:9-20 [Lect. 1:9-11, 12-13, 17-19] *"I am the first and the last & the One who lives", says the Lord.*

Alleluia Verse: *You believe in me, Thomas, because you have seen me; happy those who have not seen me,
but still believe!*

John 20:19-31 *Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*

♪ *There are days that are simply not OK.*

You get out of bed and you are on your way, This is one of those.

*There are cheerleaders & those who pump you up with platitudes that don't mean very much.
Not much at all.*

*O my friend, I will meet you where you are, I won't throw flower petals on your wounded heart.
If it's not OK, we won't pretend. But if it's not OK, it's not the end. ♪*

[Meet You Where You Are - Bing video](#)

I can imagine those gathered in fear on that first Easter needed to hear the words of that beautiful song by David Roth [on his new CD, "Meet You Where You Are."]. Jesus is meeting them where they were just a few days after he had been condemned & murdered. They were locked in a room in fear that they could meet the same fate. Jesus comes into the locked rooms of their hearts and says, "Peace be with you." And he is still ready to meet us where we are with peace & mercy. It is a *gift* offered to each of us & to all of us.

God's mercy endures forever. That is what we celebrate on the 2nd Sunday of Easter, also known as Divine Mercy Sunday. That is the repeated refrain of today's Psalm. It is this gift that Jesus gives when he says "Peace be with you." He says it three times in today's Gospel. It sounds so familiar doesn't it? We hear it many times in the Scripture, we say it to each other during the Mass. But do we really hear the **power** in those words?

Maybe a better way of hearing the words would be **PEACE IS WITH YOU**, what are you going to do with it? In the midst of change in our lives and in the Church, in the middle of war & inflation & pandemics, in the middle of the mess of this world Jesus still says: "Peace is with you because I am with you." He says it in the Scripture, he says it when we receive him in communion, & he says it through our neighbor when we share a greeting of peace.

♪ *Peace I leave with you, my friends, peace the world cannot give.*

Peace I leave with you, my friends, so that your joy be ever full.

The Father's mercy is my gift, mercy that lasts forevermore. ♪ ["Peace", Weston Priory]

[\(6\) Peace - YouTube](#)

How did the first disciples respond to Jesus when he appeared to them? First of all they rejoiced! They gave praise and thanks to God. They did what we are doing when we gather to celebrate the Eucharist - The very word "Eucharist" literally means "to give thanks and praise." We worship together to *rejoice* because Christ is risen & God is with us.

The second time Jesus says "Peace be with you" he sends his disciples, then and now, on *mission* as he had been sent by his Father. He challenges and empowers them & us to forgive as he has forgiven. He breathes on his disciples [and the word for breath in Greek and Hebrew is the same as the word for spirit].

Receive the Holy Spirit, he says, "*If you forgive people's sins, they ARE forgiven!*" We can meet the merciful Jesus in person through the sacrament of Reconciliation & can experience reconciliation with his Body, the Church. But the peace of Christ, & the mercy of God is not limited to one ritual.

It comes to us at Communion, when we say, "*Lord I am not worthy ... but only say the word & my soul shall be healed*" that is, only say the word & I will be forgiven. And when we say or sing the Our Father, Christ is reminding his followers, that the Holy Spirit gives us the power & the command to forgive each other & ourselves. Without that grace there would be no Church, then or now, because reconciliation makes the community a place of peace, a place where Christ is effectively present.

Jesus also says, "*If you hold people's sins bound, they are held bound.*" [Lectionary 1970]. The current translation in the Catholic Lectionary [1988] is different & implies something I find difficult to accept. "*whose sins you retain are retained.*" That seems to go against the readiness of Jesus to forgive and his clear command to forgive as we have been forgiven.

I used to ignore that part of the Gospel because I believe that the forgiveness that Christ offers through me is something that I cannot take back. Then I learned that the original Greek, "*krateo,*" has several possible translations in English. The Greek, which can be translated as "To hold bound" & "to retain" can also mean "to restrain".

One of the ways of understanding those words in context is to hear a promise that the power of evil cannot destroy the community of believers because the Holy Spirit *restrains* the power of sin even as we are offered forgiveness. It's not either forgive or withhold forgiveness. It's more like the power to **both** forgive sins, and to heal the damage done by sin.

That gift of the Holy Spirit is much needed today in the Ukraine, as a horrendous and sinful war is being waged on a whole nation. It is also needed to restrain the sinful attacks on the vulnerable through social media outlets like twitter & Facebook. And the lies that are being shouted by politicians & rulers of nations without conscience surely need to be restrained and replaced by the truth that Jesus lived & preached, especially in our own minds & hearts.

We are given this power to pass on to the world. That is the message of the 2nd reading from the book of Revelation. In a time when sin seems to be winning because Christians are being persecuted and even killed & political leaders are acting as oppressors, John writes from exile and shares a vision of Christ who is "*the first and the last, the one who lives,*" and who says "**I** hold the keys of death and the nether world." This is the power that holds both sin & death bound, and sets us free from even the fear of death.

The third time Jesus says, "Peace be with you" is a week after the day of his resurrection. He says to Thomas, and to us, you cannot keep me from offering you peace, my peace is not erased by your resistance. I will keep trying, come and bring your pain, your doubt, your disappointment, your fear & let me say to you: touch my wounds, see that I understand what you suffer, receive life to the full. And Jesus uses the very doubt of Thomas as a way of setting him free. Then Thomas says the words which are the clearest recognition of the divinity of Christ in the whole New Testament, "My Lord and my God."

We, like Thomas, are called and empowered to believe and to receive *life* from Jesus. The consequences of this gift of faith are described in the first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles. The ones who had locked themselves in a room out of fear were now giving witness to Christ - by being together in joyful praise, by sharing the gifts of peace and being the instruments of healing the sick and freeing those held prisoner by evil.

Today's Scriptures are full of the mercy of Christ,
that's why we celebrate Divine Mercy today.

On this wonderful day, the 2nd Sunday of Easter, Jesus says to us: Peace be with you!

Do not be afraid of living - living lives of justice, holiness, and peace -

Do not be afraid of death, whether it is the death of the body
or the change that can feel like death

Do not be afraid of sin - I have overcome it. I have forgiven you,
and I will not let the power of sin in you or around you destroy my church.

Let us join the disciples in responding to the peace of Christ by rejoicing in thanksgiving, by forgiving as Christ forgives and by putting our faith into practice by becoming instruments of peace, life & God's mercy for each other, our faith communities and the world. In that way we will be glorifying the Lord by our life. Then we can sing this song together.

♪ Peace is flowing like a river, flowing out of you and me,
flowing out into the desert, setting all the captives free. ♪

[Peace Is Flowing Like a River - Bing video](#)

A Reading from the holy Gospel according to John

It was evening on the day that Jesus rose from the dead, the first day of the week., and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the **Jewish authorities**.

Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you."

After he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

After he had said this, he breathed on them and said,

"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people's sins,

They are forgiven them, **If you hold them bound, they are held bound.**"

Thomas, one of the twelve, also called Didymus, meaning the twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord."

But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into them and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again inside the house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you."

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and examine my hands. Put your hand into my side. Do not persist in your unbelief, but believe!" Thomas said in response, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this faith you may have life in his name.

The Gospel of the Lord

John 20, 19-31



Easter Sunday Ecumenical Sunrise Service



The rising sun at the river as we celebrate the Rising Son

Link to the Ecumenical Sunrise Service in Middleburgh, April 17, 2022

[\(17\) Easter Sunrise Service April 17, 2022 - YouTube](#)