

THE EMMAUS SERIES

2nd Sunday of Easter, Year C

Acts 5:12-16

Apocalypse 1:9-13, 17-19

John 20:19-31

Peace be with you

Our Easter celebration has once again come and gone. Participation in the liturgy has probably been a deeply moving and inspiring experience for many. But now life goes on as before, in a world that does not seem to have been changed. The words of the Preface, ‘The joy of the resurrection renews the whole world’, don’t seem to ring true. As this mood overtakes us, let us recall that the apostles themselves did not find it easy to come to terms with what the Saviour’s victory over death meant for them. They had looked forward to sharing with Jesus in his messianic triumph, but now their world seemed to go on as before. It is remarkable that all four gospels tell of the ‘doubts’ and ‘hesitations’ of the apostles as they came to faith in the Lord’s Resurrection. In today’s gospel reading from John these doubts are expressed by Thomas – the stolid realist who objected at the Supper, ‘We don’t know where you are going; how can we know the way’. Perhaps we shall find the way forward in the faith journey of this Easter season if we reflect upon Jesus’ greeting of ‘Peace’, used twice when he came among the disciples on the evening of his resurrection day, and repeated when he returned to confirm the faith of doubting Thomas. As we look out on today’s world, thoughts of the ‘peace’ the world yearns for are often in our minds. Many times we have been told that we can only be peacemakers if we are at peace in ourselves; and we know from the times we have experienced true peace, that peace is more than the absence of conflict – it is a positive coming together of all that matters in our lives.

Ultimately, the Risen Lord’s gift to the world is the gift of true peace. So, in his first meeting with his disciples he points out the way that leads to the peace he will give to the human family – ‘a peace the world cannot give, that is my gift to you’ he had told them in John’s account of the Supper. The peace Christ brings is found through faith, a faith that is alive to God’s active presence in the world in Christ, and is open to learning that God’s ways challenge our expectations. ‘Happy (blessed with true peace) are those who have not seen and yet believe’. Through the gift of faith, we see beneath the surface of the lives we live and the events unfolding in our world, to accept the ‘Lord and God’ whose self-giving – forever displayed in the wounds of his risen body – invites us to trust that, in the end, beyond all our expectations, the whole of creation will be gathered into his peace. He announced the forgiveness of sins. Perhaps we baulk at the theme of ‘sin’ featuring so prominently in this first encounter. ‘Sin’ is not a fashionable notion today: our ‘liberated’ culture finds it hard to accept the obvious fact, that most of the problems of humanity are caused by the selfish abuse of freedom. It was the world’s selfishness that caused his wounds; only his triumph will bring healing the world needs.

Though a new life-force is at work – ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ – the world seems to go on as before. Things are not put right all at once, because God respects our human freedom, and calls us to play our part in the final glorious outcome: ‘As the Father has sent me, so am I sending you’.

Fr John Thornhill sm