

## Homily for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter 2018

It was quite wonderful to see the two world records broken by the Australian sprint and relay teams at the Commonwealth Games. There are many small countries who never win a gold medal. They do not have the resources we possess to support athletes. Even, so it is no small achievement to break world records. Such dedication of athletes both winners and losers inspire us, even non sporting types like me. The gold medals that are won have their meaning because the winning is shared by everyone, athletes, trainers, families and the whole community. We are very social beings. Winners attract us and show what is possible.

Last week I spoke of the candle as a metaphor of Jesus sacrificial love. The candle is consumed as it gives light. Furthermore, a light attracts us. A light in a darkened street gives us direction and gives us confidence amid our fears of the dark. We feel safe. Once we are in the light we can see where we are and we can see the direction we need to go. And we can see each other. So too with Jesus. He is the light that attracts us to him. With him we can see where we are. In fact, we can see who we are. And he shines the light for the road ahead that we travel together. A scene pictured in Acts today as the early Church lived and journeyed together.

One of the things that makes the Gospels believable is that they do not paint a pretty picture of the disciples. If you were inventing a religion you would not write a Gospel as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John did. You would want your story to be clear and without contradictions. It would be a winning project. It would not have a loser as hero like Jesus crucified. Not so the Gospels. They are all different. They are full of ordinary human beings making mistakes and trying to grasp what Jesus was offering them. In other words, the story of the disciples in the Gospels is our story as well. The doubts of Thomas we can identify with. The disciples fear in the face of powerful enemies is ours as well. So is the hypocrisy of the scribes not too different from ours.

What makes the difference? When Thomas made his famous profession of faith, “My Lord and my God” he was not just making an intellectual profession of faith in the resurrection as though he was reciting a catechism. Thomas could only say that because he had come to love Jesus. St Paul would later say, “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). Thomas had been missing from the group when Jesus first came. Perhaps back with his family and work grieving the loss they all experienced. But he had shared so much with his friends and the life they found with Jesus. So he came back to the group. From then on they came together each eighth day, the Lord’s Day - Sunday, to commemorate their Lord just as we do.

We speak of receiving the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation. The Holy Spirit dwells within us we say. But is it just lip service? If it is true would we behave as though all our prayer all our effort to do good and be good is our own doing as if we were all alone? In our minds we believe it. But in practice I think we often are little heretics. If only I try harder I will be good and God will love me! That is a naturally enough way of thinking. To become aware of the Spirit working and praying within us we have to let go of the endless demands of our egos. And the endless noise and words that surround us. That is the aim of meditation leading to contemplation to create a space so we can experience the Spirit within. Again St Paul illustrates this fundamental change of attitude that is Christian. “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:26). In meditation we let ourselves be open to the presence of the Spirit within us. It is in the Spirit that we gather to pray and join our prayers with Christ in this Eucharist.

During their time together almost in spite of themselves, Jesus befriended the twelve disciples. In spite of themselves they came to love this attractive man, Jesus, who inspired them. They did not understand everything he said. Nor do we. After the resurrection it began to make sense. But importantly he remained faithful to them whatever their failures. Such is the divine mercy of God.

I will end with this prayer in the Celtic tradition. It is a reflection on the wounds of Christ that Thomas was invited to touch:

May the Christ who walks  
on wounded feet  
walk with you on the road.  
May the Christ who serves  
with wounded hands  
stretch out your hands to serve.  
May the Christ who loves  
with a wounded heart  
open your hearts to love.  
May you see the face of Christ  
in everyone you meet,  
and may everyone you meet  
see the face of Christ in you.

(Traditional Celtic Prayer)

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