

## 2nd Sunday of Easter, Year A

The Responsorial Psalm of today's Mass (Psalm 118) is a liturgical hymn of thanksgiving to God for the protection God has given the people by saving them from a time of terrible distress. The Master of Ceremonies invites the community to celebrate the fact that God heard their cry and freed them from their afflictions. First of all he invites the assembly to express their gratitude to God and their praise by acclaiming: 'His love has no end!' Then he invites the priests to make the same acclamation. Then everyone together shouts: 'His love has no end!'

There are times in everyone's life when we are tempted to doubt God's love or to think that it has come to an end. We find ourselves caught up in economic hardship and feel powerless to do anything about it. Someone in whom we have trusted betrays our trust. We discover that we, or someone we love, have a life-threatening disease. Our child has an accident. We have been trying for years to have a child, and just as we think everything is going well, something goes wrong and our hopes are dashed. There is too much pain and too much evil and too much darkness and too little love in our world. How can God be a God of love?

Sometimes our doubts arise from a false notion of God, as though God were some kind of puppeteer, and we think that if God loved us he would pull different strings and set everything right. We have to remind ourselves that the world is not a plaything that God manipulates as he wills. Many terrible things happen in our world because people resist grace and refuse to act according to the loving inspiration of God. If we want God to respect our freedom that is how it has to be. But even when we know this, we can be excused for wondering if perhaps God is not really all-powerful or has chosen to leave us to our own devices.

The apostles probably wondered that when they watched Jesus dying on the cross. But it is important to remember that Jesus did not doubt God or God's love. He felt terrible, of course. He was lost, confused, bewildered. Nothing made sense to him, but he continued to believe in and trust God's love. The lesson of the resurrection is a lesson of trust. God does not interfere with human freedom. And so people choose to do incredibly beautiful things that spread so much love. However people also resist grace and do terrible things to each other, even to people as beautiful and loving and innocent as Jesus. Jesus teaches us to believe that God is present in the worst situations, present to us guarding our soul from being overwhelmed by evil, and holding us very close as we suffer. God is present giving us life and sustaining us as he sustained Jesus in his love. That is how Jesus saw things, with the result that he remained so beautiful even on the cross. And the Resurrection proves that his trust was not misplaced. God is not powerless. God is stronger even than death, and God will take us to himself in love if we continue to cling to him. If we cry out to him in our distress he will answer us, though, if others refuse to listen to his love we may still find ourselves suffering. We will not be alone, and because God is with us no suffering can ultimately harm us.

The risen Christ is present among us this morning reminding us of God's fidelity to him,

and sharing his Spirit with us so that we, like him, will cry out to God in our distress. He promises us that God will hear us just as God heard him.

The heart of God knows that there are many people in our world who are in distress. The Lord is at their side, but for so many there is no one to tell them. They do not know to 'call on the Lord' (Psalm 118:5) believing that 'his love is without end'. There are many who are 'thrust down' and who fall because they do not know to lean on the One who is supporting them (Psalm 118:13).

Jesus' first disciples could not stop themselves reaching out to others to tell them of all that they had seen and heard. In the readings from the Acts of the Apostles throughout this Easter season we read about the extraordinary growth of the Church as men and women came to know of Jesus and of his resurrection. In communion with Jesus they were freed from the fear of death – free to live and to live to the full amid the ups and downs of daily life.

Today's first reading gives us an insight into the idealism of that early Christian community in Jerusalem. They 'remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles' for it was the apostles who gave them their link with Jesus. It is no different today as we listen humbly and with gratitude to the official teachers of the Church, for we know that the Spirit of Jesus continues to guide them for us. They also remained faithful to the community, to the breaking of bread (the Eucharist) and to prayers. That is why, down through the ages, the community has continued to encourage its members to come together, however they might feel, on the day of the Resurrection to celebrate the Mass. It is our most holy bond, where we experience communion and support each other's faith.

Today's Second Reading is a magnificent statement by Saint Peter. He knows that we are plagued by all sorts of trials, but, because of the resurrection of Jesus, he knows that if we stay close to Jesus in our suffering we will join him in the glory of an eternal life of love.

In today's Gospel Jesus tells Thomas to do what Jesus spent his life doing, touching those who suffer. Whenever anyone is suffering the heart of God is suffering. Our wounds are his. We, like Thomas, are to place our fingers in the wounds and our hand into the pierced side. We have a mission from Christ to tell others that God is indeed by their side. But there is more to it than telling. If we really believe what we say, we can be the ones to show others that God is their support by being God's instrument in supporting them. Like the Beloved Disciple we can stand by others in their suffering. Like Thomas we can touch their wounds with gentleness, compassion and love. In this way we can help each other experience what Jesus himself experienced, and praise God here with us in the assembly for God's 'love is truly without end' (Psalm 118:1-4, 29).