

Easter Sunday, Year C

The Gospel today is from the Gospel of John. This is the gospel written by one who spoke of himself as the 'disciple whom Jesus loved'(John 21:24). It was he who was next to Jesus at the Last Supper (John 13:23) and who stood at the foot of the cross with Jesus' Mother (John 19:26). His is the Gospel of love for he in a special way came to understand the heart of Jesus.

Often throughout his gospel, John speaks of Jesus' hour of glory. It is important to remember that he is speaking of Calvary. The purpose of the Incarnation was so that we would see God. Through Jesus' words and actions, his smile, his prayer and his ready forgiveness, we came to see who God really is. Peter recalls aspects of this in the first reading of today's Mass.

Jesus' revelation of God reached its climax in his love-giving from the cross, symbolised for John in the piercing of Jesus' heart by a lance and the outpouring of blood and water (John 19:34). It was at that moment that God was fully revealed as a God of forgiveness and compassion, as a God who gives of Himself in love.

What, then, is the importance of the resurrection? It is the proof that God is as Jesus believed him to be. It is the proof that though everyone else abandoned Jesus, God did not. It is the proof that good will ultimately triumph over evil, and that the wielders of unjust power do not have the final say. The resurrection of Jesus encourages us, as it encouraged Jesus' first followers, to follow the way he showed, even through apparent failure, for it proves that there is a justice that transcends death and the limited horizons within which we tend to live our lives.

Two questions come to mind. What convinced the first disciples that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead? and How might we share this same conviction?

The stone rolled back and the cold and gaping emptiness of the tomb recalled by John in today's gospel is a sign that death could not hold Jesus in its clutches. But it does not, of itself, tell us what happened to him. The experiences which led to belief in the resurrection are expressed in what are commonly called the 'appearance stories'. These icon-like portraits in which the Evangelists express the theological significance of the resurrection touch on the many ways in which Jesus' early followers experienced the presence of the living and glorified Christ in their lives.

The story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, dramatises the fact that they experienced him as their hearts burned within them when they reflected on the sacred scriptures in the light of the events of Jesus' life and death. The dramatic scenes in which we see Jesus conversing with Mary Magdalen, and Peter and the apostles, tell us of the truth that Jesus' followers experienced him among them when they found themselves being called by him, forgiven by him, loved by him. The life which they experienced welling up within them was that of Jesus himself. It was his Spirit who inspired them, and it was the power of his love which bore fruit in their ministry. The feeling of communion which they experienced, with God and with each other, was inspired and made possible, so they believed, by the Jesus whom they had known. He was not dead but alive in God, and present at the heart of their lives.

This was especially the case when they assembled on the first day of the week to celebrate the

beginning of God's new creation, as we are assembling today. So many of the Resurrection narratives centre on the Eucharist. This is because it was at the Eucharist that, in a special way, they remembered Jesus. It was there that they heard his word proclaimed. It was there that they experienced the presence and power of his living and life-giving Spirit. It was there that they experienced their own communion as his body. It was there that they experienced the reality of his presence, nurturing them as he had always nurtured them, inspiring them as he had always inspired them, forgiving them as he had always forgiven them, calling them as he had always called them, and sending them out to draw others into the community of his love.

These were for them, as they are for us, faith-experiences, possible only to those who are in touch with the subtle movements of the Spirit of God in the depths of their lives. They were love-experiences. Their value is seen in the value of the lives of those who dared to believe.

How might we share their conviction? The Beloved Disciple gives us the answer. We must first contemplate the crucified one, for only by looking upon the one we have pierced can we see the heart of God laid bare (John 19:34-37). Only there is the veil removed so that we can see 'the glory of God in the face of Christ' (2 Corinthians 4:6).

But it is not enough just to contemplate Jesus crucified. We must experience him for ourselves as he continues the mission of love given him by God. Like Thomas, we will do this only when we listen to him calling us to reach out and touch his wounds (John 20:27). For whenever anyone is hungry or thirsty or naked or sick or imprisoned, the heart of Christ is pierced. This was the experience of the first generation of Christians, and it has been the experience of hosts of Christians since. It is when we allow him to live in us (Galatians 2:20), and to reach out to the oppressed through us, that we will experience him alive among us, and with Thomas we will find ourselves saying in sacred awe: 'My Lord and my God'.

Today's feast gives us hope for those we love who have died. It also gives us hope for ourselves. As Paul says in the Second Reading: 'When Christ is revealed - and he is your life - you too will be revealed in all your glory with him'.

There were those in Jesus' day whose only reason for hope was Jesus himself and the way he mirrored God's love to them. May all of us, especially those who are without hope this Easter, find ourselves looking at the love of Jesus' disciples and crying out in wonder: 'Jesus is risen! Praise be to God!'