

## **The Second Sunday of Easter**

### **April 24, 2022**

Several months ago, florists throughout the world began preparing for the sale of one of the most popular flowers - Easter lilies. It is estimated that 5 million Easter lilies are sold every year. How did this beautiful white flower become the preferred decoration for Christians during the Easter season? It is because people noticed that Easter lilies were shaped much like trumpets. Christians began to view them as reminders that just as a trumpet is sounded to announce the arrival of a king or dignitary, so we must trumpet the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. We are not meant to keep the good news of God's victory over sin and death a secret but must proclaim it to everyone we meet.

If we are meant to spread the message of new life in Christ with boldness, why is it that so many of us keep quiet about our faith rather than announce it to the world? We so often find ourselves keeping our faith to ourselves out of fear that we will offend someone or because we don't think we know enough to defend our beliefs. We might be afraid of being ridiculed by our friends or rejected by those we love. We might also be plagued by doubts. We may wonder whether the good news of Jesus has any relevance to life in the twenty-first century. These emotions and conflicts often keep us from living our faith with the fullness of joy which God intended us to have.

Of course, fear and doubt are nothing new to Christian believers. The followers of Christ have experienced them since the beginning. Even those who saw Jesus with their own eyes and heard the gospel message directly from His lips suffered intense fear and doubt. Today's gospel reading is a reminder of just how true this is.

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Today's reading from the gospel of John takes place on the evening of the resurrection. The apostles are confused. Though His tomb is empty, Mary Magdalene claims that Jesus appeared to her. Peter and John ran to the tomb to see for themselves. John believed, but Peter remained confused and afraid. Now they have barricaded themselves in the room where they were staying. They were afraid that they would be killed just as Jesus was. They were not able to believe in Jesus' resurrection much less celebrate and proclaim it because their hearts were imprisoned in fear.

Jesus appeared to them "despite the locked doors". Those doors were bolted fast because of the apostles' fear. The Risen Jesus, however, cannot be locked out by fear, much less by locked doors. Now that He has conquered sin and death, He is the Lord of all. Nothing can hold back His presence or keep Him from touching any heart. When the apostles recognize that it is truly the Lord - when He shows them his hands and side - their fear turns into joy. He breathes the Holy Spirit upon them to replace their fear with peace and to give them power to forgive sin. By encountering the Risen Lord, the apostles take the first step toward overcoming their paralyzing fear.

The same is true with the problem of doubt. As we all remember, Thomas was not present when Jesus first appeared to the apostles. He refused to believe that Jesus had risen. He wanted to see the Risen Lord for himself. So, the gospel continues on the first Sunday after the resurrection. The apostles are still behind locked doors. This time, however, the doors are locked not just because of fear, but because of doubt.

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Jesus proves just how patient and merciful He is with His disciples. He is not offended by Thomas' lack of faith. He does not refuse to reveal His risen glory to Thomas because of his doubts. Rather, he made a point of reaching out to him though the doors of his heart were bolted by unbelief. It is by having a personal encounter with the Risen Jesus that Thomas is able to overcome his doubts and make one of the most sincere and profound expressions of faith found in the New Testament, "My Lord and my God!"

We see what a transformation takes place in the lives of the apostles in our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles. They are now fearlessly proclaiming the good news of Jesus' resurrection throughout Jerusalem. Crowds are flocking to hear them just as they did to Jesus. And miraculous healings are taking place, just as they did by the hand of Jesus. The encounter with the Risen Lord has transformed the apostles from men hindered by fear and doubt into men who proclaim with boldness the resurrection of Jesus.

The Scriptures make it clear to us that if we find ourselves weighed down by fear and doubt, then we must encounter the Risen Lord. But is that possible so many centuries after He has ascended into heaven? Can we have an encounter with the Risen Lord here and now? The answer is "Yes"!

Remember that Jesus made His first appearance to the apostles on the night of the resurrection, a Sunday. But then Jesus waited a whole week to reveal Himself again. He didn't appear to them on Monday or Tuesday, but waited until the following Sunday to show Himself to Thomas. To drive the point home even further, in today's second reading from the book of Revelation, it is on a Sunday, the Lord's Day that John had a vision of the

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Risen Christ and received the revelation of the future. This is to make it clear to us that Sunday is the day when we encounter the Risen Lord, in particular during our celebration of the Eucharist. Therefore, for us who live so many centuries since the death and resurrection of Jesus, it is in this place where we hear the word of God proclaimed and receive the Body and Blood of Jesus that we encounter Christ still alive among us. Though we cannot see Him as clearly as the apostles did or put our fingers in His wounds as Thomas did, the encounter with Jesus is just as real and has the same power to dispel our fears and doubts.

On this day, we celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday. We recognize that God is love and that He desires to show mercy to all people. So if fear and doubt continue to siphon off our peace and joy, this is the place to bring it. Here we meet Jesus in all his risen glory. Here we exchange the burden of unbelief for the power of faith. It is here that we bloom into believers willing to trumpet the good news of a Savior who has broken down the doors of sin and death. Blessed are we! We have not seen, but we believe and cry out, "My Lord and my God!"