

2nd Sunday of Easter - B
Acts 4:32-35;
1 John 5:1-6;
John 20:19-31
Little Flower - 4/12/15

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today is the Second Sunday of Easter or Divine Mercy Sunday. Today's Gospel recounts two appearances of Jesus to his disciples after his resurrection, the first on Easter Sunday night and the second a week later. On Easter Sunday night, Jesus instituted the sacrament of reconciliation.

Today's first reading is one of three passages in Acts that describe the ideal Christian community. In today's reading, we heard, "*The community of believers was of one heart and mind...*" Likewise, we heard that this oneness was so complete that "*no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common.*" They cared so much for each other that those with property or houses would sell them so that the proceeds could be distributed to each according to need. However, we know that the reality never matched the ideal. This passage is followed first by one describing the generosity of Barnabas and then by one describing the fraud of Ananias and his wife Sapphira. This is a powerful reminder that the Church will never completely live up to its ideals because the Church is composed of less than perfect leaders and members.

The primary effect of both original sin and personal sin is alienation, alienation from God, others, the world, and ourselves. If alienation is the primary effect of sin, salvation or the forgiveness of sins is reconciliation, reconciliation with God, others, the world, and ourselves. In his Letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul makes clear that by his death on the cross, Jesus has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles with God and, therefore, with one another [2:13-19]. The crucifix symbolizes reconciliation: the vertical bar represents Jesus reconciling God and us, and the horizontal bar represents Jesus embracing all people in reconciliation.

St. Paul wrote to the Galatians: "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" [3:28]. This statement does not sound radical to us, but it was radical in St. Paul's time. The Jews considered themselves saved and non-Jews not saved. Free people were persons; slaves were non-persons. Men considered themselves and were considered superior to women. Almost twenty one centuries after Christ's death and resurrection, we still see alienation and division in the Church and the world.

In today's second reading, St. John wrote, "*And the victory that conquers the world is our faith.*" Our faith in Jesus Christ demands that all of us become healers, reconcilers, bridge builders, and peace makers within all the communities of which we are part. We have to start with respect. As St. Paul wrote to the Romans, "*Love each other as much as brothers [and sisters] should, and have a profound respect for each other*" [12:10; British JB, 1966]. We need to have a profound respect for all people and treat all people with respect. Fueled by social media, disrespect and incivility are increasing in our society and culture. We need to listen to others respectfully. Someone once wrote, "Maturity is the ability to disagree without being disagreeable." In the same passage, St. Paul would go on to write, "*Never repay evil with evil...Do all you can to live at peace with everyone*" [12:17-18]. A priest once said in a homily, "Evil never gains a victory until evil is repaid."

My brothers and sisters, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus challenges us to take the initiative in healing, reconciling, bridge building, and peace making: "*Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift*" [5:23-24]. Jesus is telling us that healing, reconciling, bridge building, and peace making are prerequisites for celebrating Eucharist well.