

## Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Apr 7th 2013

### PRE-PRAYERING

As parents prepare to bring a newborn into the world and into their homes, so we are preparing to take home from these Easter liturgies the new life and spirit flowing from the Resurrection. As a new baby asks wordlessly for attention, room, time, and nurturing, so the Risen Christ asks for the same in our lives.

We prepare for this liturgy by reflecting upon the impact of the celebrations of the Easter Vigil and the Easter Day liturgy. We have opportunities to give Jesus room as did the early Church and the frightened apostles. We can attend to his invitations to go each day, our being sent from the Eucharist. We can nurture his body by giving our flesh to his Spirit in our interactions of life. We prepare for our celebrating his resurrection by living his new life in our old skins.

### REFLECTION

We listen to the works of the early community of believers, in our First Reading today. What we hear follows immediately the death-confiding story of how Ananias and his wife Safira, as a consequence of holding back money from the community, were struck dead by the word of Peter.

So we hear that many signs and wonders wrought by the apostles attracted many new members to the group of believers. Not only could they deny life to those who did not trust in the Holy Spirit, but could defy death among those who trusted that just having Peter's shadow fall upon them. Many were healed through their faith offered them through the work of the Spirit in the preaching of Peter and the other apostles.

We might wonder ourselves about why miracles are not commonplace these days. Do we not believe? Is the Holy Spirit less present to the Church of believers these days? Do we, the sick, not have the faith needed for God to heal us?

I recall a time when a group of us Jesuits visited the Shrine of the North American Martyrs near

Midland, Ontario. Some of the relics of the Martyrs are there and the group decided to try to have a miraculous healing of one of the members of the group. We all prayed heartily and mightily and tried various pieces of bones from several of our martyred brothers. The group was saddened when no healing-miracle took place. They were discouraged, except for the one for whom these prayers and actions of faith were directed. The group felt they had lacked faith or trusted more in the bones than in the Spirit.

You might be wondering why the prayed-for was not disappointed. He had been prayed over many times and believed that his trusting God and living that faith was miracle enough. He seemed not to need signs and wonders to continue following the ways of God and the workings of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps we have enough miracles to attract us and enough doubts to make our believing free and real.

The Gospel for today's liturgy, from John, has three distinct, yet united sections. Jesus appears to the frightened apostles, minus one. He offers them peace, then offers them his mission which he received from his Father, and then breathed upon their chaos and through the gift of the Spirit tendered the gift of forgiving sins. Seven days later he appears to the same group of apostles, plus one. This one, Thomas, needed to see signs and wonders. Jesus invited him to read the signs and wonder no more. Thomas did just that.

At the end of the Gospel we hear John's final lines to the original text. A chapter has been added as a delightful conclusion. In these final verses, the author has written enough for us to believe without seeing. There were other signs and wonders for sure after the Resurrection, but these which have been recorded are offered so that the readers and pray-ers of this Gospel may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God and through this faith, there would be true life through His Name.

Old Thomas is such a good friend of ours. So are the apostles gathered together from fear and separated by their individual shame at having abandoned their Teacher and Lord. We have our doubts, our fears, our shames, and our desires to see just a little bit more so that our faith will be strengthened. It seems that God knows us more than we know ourselves. A little bit more would always be just a little bit more of what we would want. Thomas wanted to see more than he had heard his companions had seen. Seeing is not believing, but rather believing is a way of seeing beyond what can blind us.

This seeing beyond is the gift of the Spirit and it leads to our being sent out beyond as well. We are

sent, as he was sent to us, to attract others to the Sender. How we live this faith-seeing is a graceful insult to this seeing-everything world. We who try to live this beyond-sight way are a sign and wonder for this present age. Our struggles to live faithful, hopeful, and love-full lives by going out, being sent, is the miracle of our times. Relics, (the word comes from the Latin meaning remain) are the remainders, but we are the reminders that there is a beyond and what we see is a relic of the creative love of God. As reminders we make anew this creating love and Easter is our time for going out and beyond.

“Bring your hand and feel the places of the nails, and do not be unbelieving but believing, Alleluia.”

Larry Gillick, S.J.