

Connecting with the Sunday Readings

Second Sunday of Easter, Gospel Word
Divine Mercy Sunday John 20:19–31

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus appears to a fearful group of his closest followers. They were behind a locked door. One can only imagine what they were thinking. They had heard the tomb was empty. Could they have feared Jesus' return? After all, most of them had abandoned Jesus during his passion and death. Obviously they had doubts. They were disturbed and scared. They were closed up. Then suddenly, Jesus was standing in their midst. Initially his presence did not settle their fears. But the Risen Christ understands their feelings. He confidently and compassionately says, "Peace be with you." These words remove guilt and fear. He repeats this phrase many times because the peace and forgiveness he brought takes time to sink in. Then he shows them his wounds to refute their doubt.

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Living the Word

Peace, according to Saint Augustine, means "the tranquility of order." When everything is experienced as God intends, we enter the realm of peace. But it is also an evasive mood. It slips away when we are threatened. Threats to peace can come from the daily news, an unexpected setback, a disappointment, or a damaged relationship. Still, we do well to orient ourselves to the peace that God wants to give us. It was the first Easter gift.

God wills that we live in peace. Peace from within comes to us by accepting our strengths and weaknesses, our flaws, and our gifts. Peace with others flows from internal peace, which we experience when we can accept others the same way we've learned to accept ourselves, with all the positives and negatives.

The great enemy of peace is fear. But we can overcome fear only when we give it a name, only when we have identified its presence. Ultimately, fear is always about self-survival. God is on our side when it comes to survival. So trust in God's presence and allow it to lessen the hold that fear can take in your life. Peace flows from a strong Christian belief in the reliability of God.

One-line Prayer

Jesus now risen, help us to find the peace you came to give us.
 Amen.

Connecting With the Sunday Readings

Second Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday

Notice that this week is called the Second Sunday **of** Easter and not **after** Easter. That's because the celebration of Easter lasts more than one day. In a sense, we are always in the Easter season. The Resurrection is so important that the Church extends its celebration over many weeks. To grasp the full meaning of Easter, we do well to think of what the world would be like were there not an Easter. First of all, Jesus would not be present with us. He would have died and that would be that. Death would be final. And a feeling of hopelessness would exist. And the Person of Jesus might very well have been forgotten.

But that's not what happened. Jesus did rise to life after his death and he appeared to his followers. Without him, they were fearful. That's what the Gospel records. They had locked all the doors. They had lost hope. They were afraid. But that's no surprise because belief in the Resurrection can be quite difficult. We have to look at death in all its forms—straight in the eye—and believe that there's more. That's another reason the Church extends the Feast of Easter. It takes time and lots of thought for the meaning of the Resurrection to take root in us.

A Gospel Word for the Home

John 20:19–31

Jesus appeared to a fearful group of his closest followers. Their locked door means more than simply a way to protect them from the Romans or the Jews that wanted Jesus killed. They were disturbed and scared. They were closed up. Then suddenly, as the story goes, Jesus was standing in their midst. It is recorded that initially his presence did not settle matters. They became even more fearful. John wrote that they first thought he was a ghost. Talk about being scared!

His initial words to them made sense on many levels. He confidently said to them, "Peace be with you." He will repeat this phrase many times because the peace he brought takes time to sink in. Peace is God's wondrous gift to them and to us. Peace within replaces the many fears that can assail us. Peace according to Saint Augustine means "the tranquility of order." When everything is experienced as God intends, we enter the realm of peace. But it is also an evasive mood. It slips away when we are threatened. Threats to peace can come from the daily news, an unexpected setback, a disappointment, or from a damaged relationship. Still, we do well to orient ourselves to the peace that God wants to give us. It was the first Easter gift.

Thought for the Week

God wills that we live in peace. That means peace first of all with ourselves through accepting our strengths and weaknesses, our flaws, our narrowness, and the greatness that is ours through God's love. Peace with others flows from internal peace, which we experience when we can accept others the same way we've learned to accept ourselves, with all the positives and negatives. The great enemy of peace is fear. But we can overcome fear only when we give it a name, only when we have identified its presence. Ultimately, fear is always about self-survival. God is on our side when it comes to survival. So trust in God's presence and allow it to lessen the hold that fear takes on you and others in your family.

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Parent Survival

In recent years, spiritual writers have emphasized the importance of inner peace. Hundreds of programs are now available with the sole purpose of helping us to be at peace with our lives and ourselves. Some of these programs flow from a strong Christian belief in the reliability of God. Others come from various Asian religions, which seek the same goal of peace. They often use meditation and quiet reflection as a way to acquire greater inner tranquility. No matter how we seek it, peace within is something very desirable.

We know now that peace is good for maintaining health. It allows us to think more clearly. It assists us to be more "present" to ourselves and to others. Inner peace has no ill side effects. Deep down, it is the way God desires we live and it's interesting to note that Jesus' first recorded words to the disciples after the Resurrection were, "Peace be with you."

Car or Meal Talk

Are we a family of peace? What disturbs our peacefulness? Loud music? Hectic, constant running around? A lack of mutual respect? Find out your personal peace-breakers so that you can diminish their power and become better family peacemakers.

One-Line Prayer

Jesus now risen, help us to find the peace you came to give us. Amen.