

The Catholic Parish of Petworth & Midhurst West Sussex

Fr Peter's Homily for The Second Sunday of Easter (Year A) 16th April 2023

The Resurrection of Jesus changes everything. That is the message of Easter, and that is the message of the Gospel reading today. To begin with the disciples are locked away out of fear. They have seen what happened to Jesus, and they have every reason to be anxious that the people who brought him down will now come after them, so the doors are locked. But the risen Jesus suddenly stands among them and shares with them exactly the words that they need to hear: 'Peace be with you'. In an instant they go from locked away by fear, to sent out as missionaries of inner peace. That door is to be kept locked no longer, and there is a great buzz of excitement and wonder among them. They are transformed from a fearful people to a people made strong by inner peace; from a group locked away in fear, to a group sent out with confidence and power. It is hardly surprising that they locked themselves away, but its time to leave that in the past.

But where is Thomas? He has missed the moment of transformation, and so he is still working with the old way of thinking, the old mindset, the one which is limited, and fearful, and inward-looking; so he refuses to believe. Enter the Risen Lord, once again, with his power to transform. Thomas is swept from man of little faith to giant of believing in just a moment.

And it is worth noticing what it is that acts as a catalyst for these transformations. The group in the locked room are transformed by the sight of the wounds Christ bears. Jesus shows them his hands and his side, and everything is changed. To his credit Thomas, who may well have been unbelieving, picks up on what it is that really matters. He demands to see the wounds, in fact more than to see them, he demands to touch them. Again the greeting is 'Peace be with you' (a greeting that is more than mere words, a greeting that has the power to bring about what it promises), and Thomas is driven to his knees: 'My Lord and my God!'

It is the wounds which bring peace. How strange that sounds. Wounds are ugly things that make us wince; they expose what should not be seen, they bring pain into view; they shout out imperfection, damage and vulnerability. So how can they bring peace? The wounds of Jesus Christ are a reminder that he really suffered, but that suffering was not victorious. It did not defeat him, it did not define him, it did not limit him. It is the wounds in the body of Christ that make it so appealing and so convincing, make it worth risking a life for.

This is a message that we need to learn and to remember. The Church is the Body of Christ, and if it is to be an appealing and convincing presentation of that Sacred Body, it must not run away from wounds. All of us carry wounds of one sort or another: hurts, sadnesses, disappointments, failures, unfulfilled hopes and dreams. The Church, too, bears wounds and scars, the scars of hurt inflicted on it not only by those outside, but also by the failures of its members. We are most truly the Body of Christ when we acknowledge our wounds, and stand gently beside the wounds of others. The Body of Christ is a beautiful thing; but it still carries wounds. The Lord brings peace to the locked room through his wounds, and he sends the disciples out to live a wounded life that is also life-giving.

The modern world does not cope well with wounds. Because it has created an idol of physical perfection, a demanding idol that asks total obedience from its worshippers, wounds are something to be hidden away, a sign of weakness and failure. But they are there all the same, and we know they are, so as followers of the wounded Christ we will not be afraid of them. We will need to help people acknowledge their frailty, their woundedness, their imperfection, and reassure them that this is ok and all is well. The wounds of Christ are so convincing because they chime with reality, with human life as we know it actually is. We know that to be human is to hurt, and the pretence of perfection is in reality inhuman, a kind of torture.

So today we look at the wounds of Christ and find in them a certain peace. We find there, also, a challenge, because they do prod us into acknowledging our own imperfection, our own woundedness, and challenge us to accept that this is ok; then we will have something to say to a culture where wounds are hidden, itching and festering out of sight. In his wounds we can find our peace.