



More about Today's Scriptures

2nd Sunday of Easter

Today's readings call us to faith in the risen Christ. In Acts, Peter attests to the resurrection of Jesus Christ as an act of God, an act that forms the basis for Christian community. The first letter of Peter envisions faith in and love for Christ as a sign of our salvation. In the gospel, Jesus does not leave Thomas behind, but rewards his persistence with faith.

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

In the Easter season, following an ancient tradition, a reading from the Acts of the Apostles

is used as the first reading.

"For every gain in deep certitude there is a corresponding growth of superficial 'doubt.' This doubt is by no means opposed to genuine faith, but it mercilessly examines and questions the spurious 'faith' of everyday life, the human faith which is nothing but the passive acceptance of conventional opinion."

—Thomas Merton

from the first of these discourses, in which Peter addresses the crowd on the Day of Pentecost.

The account stresses the providence of God in the disposition of these events. In the paradoxical fate of the Messiah, human freedom and divine necessity are intertwined. Humanity's act of rejection is reversed by God's act of affirmation. Then Peter uses citations from the Old Testament to show that Jesus is the Messiah. Of the events foretold in the scripture, the apostles themselves were eyewitnesses.

1 Peter 1:3-9

Throughout the Easter season, the second reading is taken from 1 Peter, written to the Christians of Asia Minor who were facing persecution for their faith. The bulk of 1 Peter is not like a letter in form or style, but more like a sermon given at a baptism. Some scholars have even suggested that it might be a text for the Easter baptismal liturgy.

Today's reading is a prayer of thanksgiving for God's offering to believers a rebirth and new life through the resurrection of Jesus. This life is lived in the hope of an inheritance "kept in heaven" (v. 4). Even now Christians are guarded in their trials, sustained by their faith in Jesus, even though they have never seen him.

John 20:19-31

The first appearance of the risen Lord to the disciples stresses Jesus' fulfillment of the promises that he made in the great farewell address in chapters 14-17.

Thomas will not accept the Easter proclamation on the word of others but wishes to experience the risen Christ directly. Yet he can still penetrate the meaning behind the marvel and make a full affirmation of Christian faith. He consummates the sequence of titles given to Jesus throughout the gospel by giving him the ultimate title, God.

Verses 30-31 serve as a conclusion to the gospel. They evaluate the content of the gospel, inviting all to understand the meaning of Jesus' life, death and resurrection and, through belief, to share in a saving relationship with him.

Reflection

One would expect trumpets, lilies and glory on the first Sunday after Easter, but no. Today's gospel shows that the road won't be easy and the story won't end. Jesus' reunion with his friends isn't the triumph we might expect, but is marred by Thomas' doubt. His confession "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28) is pulled from him only after blatant proof, and Jesus' rhetorical question, "Have you believed because you saw me?" (John 20:29) carries a hint of sarcasm.

Many scholars consider John 21 an epilogue, making this chapter the ending. Does it seem unsatisfying?

Perhaps it is hopeful, nudging the door open a crack for those who come later, entertaining doubt. Maybe it says, if Thomas can convert, anyone can! As L. William Countryman writes in *The Mystical Way in the Fourth Gospel*, "One does not have to be the perfect mystic to be accepted among the circle of disciples. Even Thomas can still qualify; indeed Jesus will make special concessions to confirm his faltering belief" (p. 136).

This final chapter encourages us, then, to bring along our doubts in our backpacks and continue along the unending road. Jesus beckons us to come.