

March 30, 2008
Second Sunday of Easter
Acts 2:42-47
1 Peter 1:3-9
John 20:19-31

On this second Sunday of Easter, we are invited to reflect on God's infinite mercy. The beginning of the First Letter of Peter speaks of it in a particular and significant way. Blessed be God the Father, the writer exclaims, because "in his great mercy," God has given to us a "new birth to a living hope."

Why are we reborn? Why can we hope? Because God has raised Jesus from the dead. And not Jesus alone. Since God in Jesus became one of us, we will have a share in the resurrection. The writer of 1 Peter calls this our "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" inheritance.

How could we have earned an inheritance like this? God knows, and so do we, that we do not deserve it. But it is ours through God's mercy and love, which have been revealed to us in the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus, and through the inspired biblical authors.

We in the church are a people of hope. But it is not always easy to hope. Hope does not come automatically to everybody. In today's gospel, we hear of one close to Jesus, who was not very hopeful, even after he received the resurrection news.

Thomas was not there—on that first Easter evening. Thomas, who when the news of Lazarus's death reached Jesus, said, yes, we will go to his family, but Jesus will die, and we will die with him. Thomas, who, at the Last Supper, was confused about where Jesus was going from there and didn't understand how his friends could be with him. Thomas, who insisted that he would have to touch Jesus' wounds in order to believe he was alive once more. Thomas, who stands in for many, perhaps for most of us.

We can't really blame Thomas. What the other disciples were saying about Jesus was unprecedented. No one had died and risen, body and soul, to new life. Beliefs about an afterlife in the larger culture generally involved disembodied spirits. Some Jewish people accepted the concept of resurrection but thought that it would occur in the end times. Which tells us something about the context in which the first Christians viewed Jesus' resurrection. So Thomas was probably not wrong to be skeptical.

Now, notice how Thomas reacted when he finally did see the risen Christ. Did he still insist on touching him? He did not. Rather, he made the simplest and the most profound statement of faith found in the New Testament: "my Lord and my God." Fear, skepticism and doubt changed instantly to joy and faith for Thomas. Is this not an amazing example of God's mercy?

The only further mention of Thomas in the John's Gospel is that he was one of the disciples who shared breakfast with the risen Jesus by the Sea of Tiberias. There is an ancient tradition that Thomas brought the gospel to India and was martyred there. I think it is safe to say that once Thomas had met Jesus in the upper room on the Sunday after the Resurrection, he was filled with hope, even at the end of his own earthly life.

So should we be. For Thomas, going before us, asked the questions we would have liked to have asked and the response that he received is the response made to us all. And notice what Jesus also said, "blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." Who are "those"? All Christians since the first apostolic witnesses.

Still, hope can be difficult. That is why, as always, we need to support each other, not tear each other down. That is why we need to remember that the creator of the universe is a God of mercy and love, not a God of vengeance. (Vengeance, sadly, is our thing). That is why we need to believe that God has given us a new birth, of which baptism is the great sacramental sign. Last

weekend eleven adults, teens and children were baptized at Assumption. This weekend seven little ones are being baptized. Does this not give us hope? For baptism, like the experience of Thomas, points directly to the “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” inheritance prepared for us—our resurrection.

Do these ancient stories and modern rituals make our new way of being a reality? Does Jesus’ resurrection have an impact on every part of our lives or just on what we would call the spiritual part? Can we truly help each other become people of hope, who are thankful for God’s mercy? Let us reflect on these questions now, and in the coming weeks of Easter.

Amen.