

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

Second Sunday of Easter

First reading:

(Acts 4.32-35)

Christian Sharing

On the next six Sundays of Eastertide we hear the story of the earliest Christian community. Each Eastertide the Church puts it forward as a model for us, giving important aspects of their life.

This first reading stresses the unity of the community, and the mutual caring to ensure that no one is in want. This care of those in need, and particularly in financial matters, remains a strong challenge to us today. The care for the needy remains a strong emphasis throughout the Bible, from the earliest part of the law codes of Israel until the Letter of James and beyond. As man and woman are made in the image of God, we are to care for one another and for those in need as God cares for us; this is part of the human obligation to foster life and to care for creation.

The gospel of Luke especially stresses the dangers of wealth and the need to use wealth responsibly and generously. This is followed through in the Acts of the Apostles as part of being 'one in heart and mind'. The other feature of their life together is the bold proclamation of the Resurrection of the Lord

Question:

How far is the model practicable for a modern Christian community?

Second reading:

(1 John 5.1-6)

Begotten by God

The second readings for the Sundays of Eastertide this year are all from the first Letter of John. The main topic is Christian love. It is quite significant that this Sunday's passage is out of order. It centres on two overarching aspects of Christian love, which are vital for any genuine manifestation of that love. The first aspect is that this love, which conquers the world, is built on faith in Jesus as Son of God. 'The world' here stands for all the evil and godless attitudes standing in opposition to Christian values. By raising Jesus from the dead God has shown the vanity of these attitudes, and has made the victory of Christian love over them sure. These are the true values that in the end will prevail. The second aspect is that by Christian love we are raised to be sons of God, co-heirs with Christ and able to cry 'Abba, Father' truly to God. To the Hebrew mind to be a 'son of' is wider than mere physical generation. It involves respect, devotion, obedience, keeping an eye on, careful conformity in desire, ability and behaviour. It is much like being 'in the image of', but closer, stronger, more heartfelt and more intimate.

Question:

Which imagery do you prefer: to be a son of God or in the image of God?

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

Gospel

(John 20.19-31)

Jesus in the Upper Room

Two aspects of this meeting are especially striking. This is the last scene of the gospel of John, for Chapter 21 is an appendix. At the end, before the concluding reflection, Thomas gives the only direct acclamation in the New Testament of Jesus as God. Nowhere else is Jesus directly hailed as 'God', although there are ways in which he is equivalently so presented. So, in a way, this acclamation of the Risen Christ is the climax of the New Testament.

Second, it is striking that Jesus' final blessing is of peace and forgiveness. The mission of all Christians is to bring these to a troubled world. Throughout the Bible God is a God of forgiveness. The Old Testament consists of a series of covenants of forgiveness, each in turn broken by God's Chosen People. The covenant with Noah after the Flood, the covenant with Abraham, with Moses after the worship of the Golden Calf, finally the new covenant promised by Jeremiah when unfaithful Israel is being exiled to Babylon. Christianity is not for the perfect but for the sinner, surrounded by sinners. Forgiven sinners must bring forgiveness to all those around them.

Question:

How far is the authority of the Church compatible with individual judgment?
