

Commentary on Sunday Scripture Readings

Second Sunday of Easter

First reading:

*A Community of Peace
(Acts 2.42-47)*

The first readings throughout Eastertime this year are about the earliest community of the followers of Jesus (they had not yet acquired the name 'Christians') at Jerusalem. From time to time Luke, the author of that history of the earliest spread of the Christian message called 'The Acts of the Apostles', gives a summary of their lifestyle. This passage is the first of these summaries, placed just after the birth of the Church at Pentecost.

It is a picture of peace, generosity and devotion, summed up in grateful praise of God. Luke is showing us the quality of a community where the Spirit of God is given free play; he is giving us an ideal to strive for. It is a community to which anyone would wish to belong, a community in which love prevails, where each member is attentive to the needs of others. It is not surprising that their number was constantly on the increase. Are the pillars on which it stands the two types of prayer, in the Temple and in the Eucharist, or the resultant human goodness of generosity and joy? Perhaps, as in any community we experience, there were tensions beneath the surface, but the warmth of trust in the Lord breathes through the account and promises a solution to every problem.

Question: What is the most attractive feature of this Christian community?

Second reading:

*A Sure Hope
(1 Peter 1.3-9)*

Throughout the Easter season this year we read this First Letter of Peter. Whether it was actually written by the fisherman, the enthusiastic and impetuous leader of the Twelve, or simply attributed to him, is still discussed by scholars. The answer makes little difference to the positive message of the Letter, which is full of the optimism of the new Christian movement, the love, confidence and joy of looking forward to the promised inheritance.

Traditionally, the Easter Vigil is the time for new baptisms, and so new births into the Church. Even if we were baptized long ago, we can still benefit from the occasion to refresh our newness in Christ. New birth into Christ brings with it a promise of an inheritance. Just as an earthly inheritance can change a whole situation and way of life, even a change of personality, so does our entry into Christ.

Of course, it brings with it responsibilities and duties, and the reading mentions the trials which test us like gold. I know that I, for one, still have a lot of dross which needs to be purged before I can confidently stand before the Lord and claim my inheritance as a son of God.

Question: Is my baptismal freshness tarnished or enriched or both?

Gospel: *The Peace of the Risen Christ* (John 20.19-31)

This passage from John's Gospel has all the more significance because it brings the Gospel to a close. The story of the breakfast party with the Risen Christ on the shore of the Lake of Galilee is a sort of appendix. The storyline of the main Gospel ends with Thomas blurting out 'My Lord and my God'. The Gospel therefore ends, as it began, with the only two unmistakable declarations in the New Testament of the divinity of Jesus.

'The Word was God' and 'My Lord and my God' bracket the Gospel, showing the purpose and angle of the whole, to show that Jesus is God. It complements the other gospels: they show a man who is also God, whereas this Gospel shows a God who is also man. It is with the divine authority that Jesus confers on his Church the divine power to forgive.

Real forgiveness is indeed Godlike. It is not simply 'forgive-and-forget', but forgiveness in the knowledge that a hurt has occurred. Just as a bone, broken and merged together again, can be stronger than it was before it was broken, so forgiveness can create a real link of love on both sides, a treasured secret of divine graciousness between forgiver and forgiven.

Question:

Am I part of the Church's divine power to forgive?
