

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER (SUNDAY OF DIVINE MERCY)

The tone of this reading, from early in Acts, is one of awe at the vocation of the apostles, as well as purpose, as the work of that vocation reveals itself.

Slight pause between "all" and "according."

Slight pause between "number" and "those."

LECTIONARY #43

READING I Acts of the Apostles 2:42-47

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

They devoted themselves

to the **teaching** of the **apostles** and to the **communal life**,
to the **breaking** of **bread** and to the **prayers**.

Awe came upon **everyone**,

and **many wonders** and **signs** were **done** through the **apostles**.

All who **believed** were **together** and had **all things** in **common**;

they would **sell** their **property** and **possessions**

and **divide** them among **all according** to each one's **need**.

Every day they devoted themselves

to **meeting together** in the **temple area**

and to **breaking bread** in their **homes**.

They ate their **meals** with **exultation** and **sincerity of heart**,
praising **God** and enjoying **favor** with all the **people**.

And **every day** the **Lord** added to their **number** **those** who were
being **saved**.

READING I In today's first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, Luke describes his vision for the life of the early Church community, which he places immediately after Peter's speech to the Jews who had come to Jerusalem from many parts of the world for the feast of Pentecost and the subsequent baptism of some three thousand people that day (Acts 2:14-41). It will be followed by a story in which Peter heals a crippled man who used to beg at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple (Acts 3:1-10), perhaps intended as an

example of the "wonders and signs [that] were done through the apostles."

The defining elements of this ideal Christian community are that they hold fast to the teachings of the apostles and to the common life of Christian fellowship and that they share in the breaking of the bread (i.e., Eucharist) and the prayers. The Greek word translated here as "communal life" is *koinonia*, meaning "partnership or communion." Although this is the only place it appears in Acts, Paul uses *koinonia* multiple times in his letters to refer to the notion of church. Further, we are told that they

were together in one place and that they shared everything in common (Greek, *koinos*) and distributed things to those who had needs. What might it look like today for our parishes and families to be inspired by this life of common care, fellowship, and faith?

READING II Biblical scholars have wrestled with several questions related to the First Letter of Peter, including authorship and date of composition. Because the document contains hints that it was written after Peter's martyrdom, perhaps between AD 70 and 90, most bibli-

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 118:2–4, 13–15, 22–24 (1)

R. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.

or

R. Alleluia.

Let the house of Israel say,
“His mercy endures forever.”

Let the house of Aaron say,
“His mercy endures forever.”

Let those who fear the LORD say,
“His mercy endures forever.”

I was hard pressed and was falling,
but the LORD helped me.
My strength and my courage is the LORD,
and he has been my savior.
The joyful shout of victory
in the tents of the just.

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.

By the LORD has this been done;
it is wonderful in our eyes.

This is the day the LORD has made;
let us be glad and rejoice in it.

READING II 1 Peter 1:3–9

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Peter

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who in his **great mercy** gave us a **new birth** to a **living hope**
through the **resurrection of Jesus Christ** from the **dead**,
to an **inheritance** that is **imperishable, undefiled,**
and **unfading**,
kept in **heaven** for you
who by the **power of God** are **safeguarded through faith**,
to a **salvation** that is **ready to be revealed in the final time**.
In **this** you **rejoice**, although **now** for a **little while**
you may have to **suffer through various trials**,
so that the **genuineness** of your **faith**,
more **precious than gold** that is **perishable** even though
tested by fire,
may **prove to be for praise, glory, and honor**
at the **revelation of Jesus Christ**. »

Blessed = BLES-uhd

This reading begins a series of readings during Easter Time from the First Letter of St. Peter, the tone of which is thoughtful, joyful, hopeful, and gentle.

“Faith” is Peter’s watchword. Give it a little added emphasis here and at the end of the reading.

cal scholars believe that it is a pseudonymous work intended to preserve Peter’s memory and extend his influence into the next generation of Christians. Additionally, biblical scholars have entertained questions about whether this document is a letter or some other literary genre. It has an opening and closing like a letter, but instead of a thanksgiving, it has a blessing. The rest of the document reads more like a homily or an exhortation on baptism and Christian living.

Today’s reading begins with the words “Blessed be the God,” which is similar to

other blessings that we find in Jewish prayers (e.g., Genesis 9:26; Psalms 66:20; 68:20; 72:18), and it goes on to describe how the recipients of this document are God’s chosen ones. By the great mercy of God, they are begotten again to a life of hope in and through Jesus’ resurrection. To what else are they born anew? To an imperishable inheritance that is reserved in the heaven for those who have been kept secure by God’s power and the gift faith. And for what end? For the salvation that will be revealed at the end time. But we are not yet in the end time. The author tells his

readers that they will have to endure suffering in order to test the genuineness of their faith. The imagery is that of the refiner’s fire. One of the ways that Scripture explains suffering is to say that God is like the refiner who heats metal to separate gold from the impurities in order to create a more beautiful piece of handiwork (e.g., Malachi 3:2–4). Thus, suffering is not punishment, but rather it is purifying and educative in order to prepare the sufferer for a more beautiful reality, in this case, the salvation of their souls.

A passage containing a great deal of inherent and relatable mystery. Thomas not only stands for the person who needs to see in order to believe; he is also a stand-in for the reluctant believer or for anyone struggling with belief, giving his recognition of Jesus and his expression of faith even greater resonance.

Jesus announces his presence with the word "peace" in this passage. The word is focal.

Repetition of "peace."

Thomas' expressions of doubt in this passage should be treated with care.

Although you have not **seen** him you **love** him;
even though you do not **see** him **now** yet **believe** in him,
you **rejoice** with an **indescribable** and **glorious** joy,
as you **attain** the **goal** of your **faith**, the **salvation** of your **souls**.

GOSPEL John 20:19–31

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

On the **evening** of that first day of the **week**,
when the **doors** were locked, where the **disciples** were,
for **fear** of the **Jews**,
Jesus came and stood in their **midst**
and said to them, "**Peace** be with you."
When he had **said** this, he **showed** them his hands and his **side**.
The disciples **rejoiced** when they saw the **Lord**.
Jesus said to them again, "**Peace** be with you.
As the **Father** has sent me, so I send **you**."
And when he had **said** this, he **breathed** on them and **said**
to them,
"**Receive** the Holy Spirit.
Whose sins you **forgive** are **forgiven** them,
and whose **sins** you **retain** are **retained**."
Thomas, called **Didymus**, one of the **Twelve**,
was not **with** them when Jesus **came**.
So the other disciples said to him, "We have **seen** the **Lord**."
But he said to them,
"Unless I see the **mark** of the nails in his **hands**
and put my **finger** into the nailmarks
and put my **hand** into his side, I will **not** believe."

GOSPEL Today's Gospel is taken from the post-resurrection story in the Gospel of John. Mary Magdalene, who encountered the risen Jesus in the garden tomb in Jerusalem, is sent to tell the disciples that Jesus has been raised from the dead. She does so, beginning with the words "I have seen the Lord" (John 20:18). In John's Gospel, seeing is closely connected to belief or full faith in Jesus.

As this reading opens, we find that Jesus' disciples are in hiding "for fear of the Jews." Since these disciples are also Jews, we should not interpret statements like this

one in John's Gospel as encouraging fear or hatred of Jewish people. Instead, most Johannine scholars suggest that the author is writing out of a context in which Jewish Jesus followers, including the author of this Gospel, are being persecuted by their fellow Jews over the idea that Jesus was the long-awaited messiah. In most cases, "the Jews" is used interchangeably with references to the religious authorities in Jerusalem, so we can safely assume that they are the target of the author's ire.

The first part of this scene bears some similarities to Luke 24:36–40, in which the

risen Jesus appears suddenly and displays his hands and feet to the disciples to allay their fears and show that he is truly alive. However, John's version of the story includes a greeting, "Peace be with you," along with a conferral of the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sin. The greeting of peace is a reminder of Jesus' words to the disciples during the farewell discourse, when he says "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. . . . Do not let your hearts be troubled" (John 14:27). The conferral of the Holy Spirit here, when Jesus breathes upon the disciples, should bring

Another repetition of "peace."

Jesus' words to Thomas are spoken with gentleness.

Thomas' recognition is joyful—its expression conveys the joy. No need to overemphasize it.

The conclusion of this Gospel reading speaks directly to the assembly, using the second person pronoun. Even though the word isn't rhythmically emphasized, it is thematically focal.

Now a **week later** his disciples were **again** inside and **Thomas** was with them.

Jesus came, although the doors were **locked**, and stood in their **midst** and said, "**Peace** be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger **here** and see my **hands**, and bring your **hand** and put it into my **side**, and do not be **unbelieving**, but **believe**."

Thomas answered and said to him, "My **Lord** and my **God!**" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to **believe** because you have **seen** me?"

Blessed are those who **have not seen** and have **believed**."

Now, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his **disciples** that are not **written** in this **book**.

But these are **written** that you may come to **believe** that **Jesus** is the **Christ**, the **Son of God**, and that **through this belief** you may have **life** in his name.

to mind the second creation story of Genesis where God creates a man, Adam, and breathes into him the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). The disciples are made "new" insofar as they have a new mission, which is to continue the work that God had given Jesus to do—to be the light that casts out darkness (John 8:12).

The second part of this scene is about the apostle Thomas. It is a reminder that not all of us come to faith in the same way and at the same time. The narrator of the story provides no new setting, suggesting that the disciples are still in hiding on this

first day of the week, when Thomas arrives. When the disciples tell him, "We have seen the Lord," he adamantly refuses to believe. But when the risen Jesus appears again after eight days to respond to Thomas' demand to see the risen Jesus' wounds, Thomas makes a profound expression of faith: "My Lord and my God." The blessing directed toward those who have not seen but believe is intended for the Johannine community and by extension to us. Such is the mercy of God! C.C.