



SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

CYCLE C

Acts 5: 12-16

Revelation 1: 9-11a, 12-13, 17-19

John 20:19-31

GATHERING

(An Easter lily or other white flowers and several unlit white candles rest on a table covered with red cloth. As members arrive, they are invited to place their copies of the New Testament on the table.)

This week's readings look at the gift of faith, the struggle to receive faith and the relationship between faith and action. Last week we grappled with the incomprehensible truth of the living Christ. How are you giving witness to that truth during Easter week? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The candles are lit and the leader invites the community to a time of silence. After a couple of minutes, the community prays as follows.)

Leader: The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

All: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created

and you shall renew the face of the earth. O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever rejoice in your consolation through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

(An selection of reflective instrumental music is played.)

Focus Question

When have you been glad that you doubted?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly struck them this week. Members then read over the commentary and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering into conversation.)

Commentary

In this week's scriptures, faith is examined, both in the lives of individuals and in the life of the community. The foundations of Christian faith are scrutinized as lived out in the earliest days of the church.

In the reading from Acts, three groups are identified; the apostles, the people and a group called "the others." The apostles heal and teach publicly. The "people" are those attracted by the work, courage, generosity and humility of the apostles, those willing to follow and see what benefits accrue to them by limited association with the apostles. "The others" seems to refer to a group of believers who, aware that Peter and John had already been arrested, hesitate to risk public action with them. The reading, recorded in the early days of Christianity, refrains from judgment or disdain. It might even seem to exhibit some sympathy for the less robust levels of faith implied in those who held back.

John, sentenced to exile, has his faith confirmed in a mystical vision. He obeys the command to "write down what you have seen," i.e., the glorious final victory of Christ and his church. He writes in order to alleviate fear and encourage future believers who may suffer for their faith. As in the first reading, this second reading

communicates an awareness and sympathy for the cost of the human struggle to persevere in faith. The gospel presents the great and important story of *doubting Thomas*, as well as John's version of Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit coming to the community.

Having last interacted with Jesus in the chaos and panic of his arrest and trial, the disciples, locked away in fear, experience Jesus as suddenly among them. Without preamble, Jesus bestows his *shalom* on them and then shows them his wounded hands and side. They "rejoiced" because their complicity in Jesus' suffering is transformed through his forgiving greeting of *peace*. Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit onto them; he sends them forth; he instructs them to forgive sin. Here the church is founded in its power which is the Spirit, in its mission which is to spread the good news, and in its work which is to forgive sin. To do all this, faith is essential.

During this important event, Thomas is missing. But quickly, the newly commissioned apostles find Thomas and profess their faith, "We have seen the Lord." It is an invitation for Thomas to do likewise. Thomas' conditions for belief are graphic. His refusal of the apostles' witness is adamant. Despite this, the disciples do not exclude Thomas from their circle and when Jesus next comes he is in their number. Jesus meets Thomas' faith demands and invites him to touch and believe. In and through his fierce dynamics of doubt, Thomas is led to even greater faith. Forgiveness, forbearance, support and sympathy for the human struggle to reach faith is practiced by the early community in imitation of Christ. They lead to Thomas' responding expression of faith to the community, a declaration bolder even than that expressed earlier by the other apostles. Thomas utters the definitive statement of Christian assent, "My Lord and my God."

This week's readings instruct us that the community's tolerance of doubt can lead individuals, and indeed the community itself, to a greater experience of faith. May we remember and do likewise.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ How has doubt played a role in your faith development?
- ◆ In the readings from both Acts and John, the Easter community continues to accept and include those who do not have full faith. Where in your life are you confronting a similar situation?

- ◆ With whom do you share your doubts or faith struggle?
- ◆ What are your *unresolved* faith questions? What do you do with them? How well do you *love* your questions?
- ◆ In your experience, how has forgiveness led to peace?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

(The leader poses the question, “What does God ask of you/us in light of our sharing of life and faith this week?” After a few minutes of reflection, the leader invites conversation in response to the question.)

- ◆ Offer to serve or support the adult catechetical ministry in your parish.
- ◆ Over the course of several days, jot down all the questions you have about your faith and life. On yet another day, take the questions you have written down to church with you. Spend twenty minutes before the Blessed Sacrament in reflection and prayer. Let your prayer be, “I believe Lord. Help my unbelief.”
- ◆ Pax Christi USA is a movement that “strives to create a world that reflects the peace of Christ. . .” It works out of the basis of faith, working toward peace through forgiveness and justice. Learn more about this movement at www.paxchristiusa.org
- ◆ Read the book, **The Process of Forgiveness**, by William A. Meninger (Continuum International Publishing Group) or **Don’t Forgive Too Soon: Extending the Two Hands That Heal** by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn and Matthew Linn (Paulist Press).

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(Members retrieve their New Testaments from the table. The leader invites them to open their books at random in one of the four gospels and begin to read until they come to some question spoken by Jesus or another person in the narrative. When all have encountered a question, members take turns reading the question aloud. Some time of silence prevails after each question. When the reading of these questions is complete, the leader invites prayers of praise, thanksgiving and petition. To each prayer, members respond, “My Lord, and my God, hear us.”

Leader: Gracious God, we come in gratitude for what we have been given once again in faith this day and in our gathering. Sisters and brothers, Jesus, our Lord and our brother, has shown us the example of forbearance, forgiveness and love. He founded his church on these actions and offered us his peace.

All: Father, teach us the forbearance of Jesus. Forgive us our sins, both individual and communal, as we extend forgiving shalom to others. Grant us the deep desire to work for peace. In Jesus name, we pray.

All: Amen.

(Members join in singing a familiar Easter hymn.

