

HOMILY EASTER SUNDAY 02 – A (Homily 02)

“Believe and Live Life to the Full”

(Acts 2:42-47; 1 Pt 1:39; Jn 20:19-31)

“Most people lead lives of quiet desperation.”

That quote by the philosopher Henri Thoreau sadly reflects the reality of all too many people in our modern world.

The readings for this second Sunday of Easter, however, combine to almost shout out a different message, “No, that does not have to be so. Only believe in Jesus, and you can live life to the full.”

That message is found, like a gem almost hidden in the sand, at the end of today’s gospel: “These words are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

The whole purpose for the coming of Jesus into this world, for his teachings and miracles, is faith – belief that he is the Christ, the Messiah, the one who was sent by God, anointed by God, the very Son of God. This was a dramatic paradigm shift for the apostles who were devout Jews, steeped in monotheism, the belief that there was only one God and no other. What a shift to faith in a Triune God.

That is why Thomas struggled so much to believe, and also why, when he did encounter Jesus, his act of faith was so powerful. “My Lord and my God,” Thomas blurted out when he saw Jesus. With those words, Thomas articulated precisely what Jesus wanted, faith in him as Risen Lord and as one with the Father, or God.

This was not a demure faith. It made a difference in their lives, and is meant to do the same for us. The effects of that faith are spelled out in the readings, starting with the Gospel - that we may have life to the full.

That fullness of life permeates the whole Gospel account of Jesus’ appearance to the apostles in the upper room. First, there is freedom from fear. They had locked the doors for fear of the Jews, and Jesus came right through those locked doors. Their fear was replaced by deep peace and profound joy.

Next was the realization that they were being forgiven. They were experiencing the very nature of the God that Jesus came to reveal, a God who is merciful, just,

gracious, loving and above all, not just forgiving but forgiveness incarnate. The apostles had just denied and abandoned Jesus, and here he was, lavishing forgiveness on them with no hint of anger or recrimination. Living life to the full is all about receiving the forgiveness of God for our sins.

It does not stop there. Jesus goes on to breathe on them and basically, make Pentecost happen for them right then and there, the evening of the day of his resurrection. He fills them with his Spirit of forgiveness and empowers them to extend this very same forgiveness of God to any who repent and believe. The fullness of life is all about being able to forgive, to let go of anger, resentment and any desire for revenge.

Moving to the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we find the lines that form the basis for the *Returning To Our Roots* process that our archdiocese initiated the First Sunday of Lent. The fullness of life can be found in being dedicated to prayer, the teachings of the apostles, the Eucharist and the communal life. Our whole hearted participation in this process can empower us to experience more deeply that life to the full that the readings describe.

Another key aspect of the fullness of life that the early church manifested so well was the sharing of goods. There was no one who was in need. Everyone's needs were met. What a beautiful challenge for us as disciples of the Lord today, to try to answer the emotional needs of our young people especially, as well as the legitimate needs for the basics of life for all.

Finally, we turn to the second reading from the first letter of Saint Peter, and we hear him exquisitely describing the fullness of life. What could be more beautiful than these words? "Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him, and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

There is it, put in a way that could hardly be improved upon. The result of faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the Lord, the Son of God, as God, is exuberant and glorious joy. That joy is not a passing feeling or emotion like pleasure or happiness. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit that is our legacy, our inheritance, ours to claim and to enjoy, right here and now. Salvation is the experience of heaven here on earth, through faith in Christ and love for one another. We don't have to wait until we die to go to heaven. We are entitled, called, indeed, presented with the reign of God at this moment, no matter what is going on in our lives. That is reason

to rejoice. And rejoice we should, or else we run the risk of giving credence to another philosopher who claimed that if we Christians wanted others to believe in our redeemer, we need to act more redeemed. We have been redeemed, and Easter is a radical invitation to us to truly celebrate that redemption with joy.

Sometimes, faith works in our lives in strange ways. A young man who had been raised as an atheist was training to be an Olympic diver. The only religious influence in his life came from his outspoken Christian friend. The young diver never really paid much attention to his friend's sermons, but he heard them often. One night the diver went to the indoor pool at the college he attended. The lights were all off, but as the pool had big skylights and the moon was bright, there was plenty of light to practice by. The young man climbed up to the highest diving board and as he turned his back to the pool on the edge of the board and extended his arms out, he saw his shadow on the wall. The shadow of his body was in the shape of a cross. The man felt a strange feeling, like someone was speaking to him. Instead of diving, he knelt down and finally asked God to come into his life. As the young man stood, a maintenance man walked in and turned the lights on. The pool had been drained for repairs.

This quote, from a 1691 manuscript, describes our reality as believers. "Christian, recognize your dignity and, now that you share in God's own nature, do not return to your former base condition by sinning. Remember who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Never forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of the Kingdom of God."

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is a deep act of faith. We believe that the "Jesus of history" who walked on this earth, is now the "Christ of faith", who by Word and Sacrament fills us with his spirit of forgiveness, peace and joy.

May our celebration today deepen our faith in Jesus as Lord, Messiah, Son of God, and fill us with that indescribable and glorious joy that is part of living life to the full.