

Fr James' homily for the Second Sunday of Easter 2020

First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 2:42-47
Second Reading: First Letter of St Peter 1:3-9
Gospel: John 20:19-31

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! You know, perhaps, what I am going to say: It is STILL Easter Day today, and has been for the last week. I hope amid all the stresses of these days you have had a week filled with the Good News that Jesus is risen from the grave.

Today, as lockdown continues, let us pause to savour our worship. We can use this difficult time truly to enter into our worship and renew it, even as we are separated from our churches for even longer. We can use the strangeness of this time to reconnect with the point of our worship. It is good to participate in worship “virtually” by means of internet streaming (*and I am recommending the schedule of worship from the Shrine in Walsingham*)... but take care this doesn't become a distraction, a spectator sport whilst the priest on view does the work. Worse still take care it doesn't become a shopping expedition, grazing across the vast streaming options available and even “channel hopping!” When we worship we have a job to do, a vital, necessary job. The scriptures today point to that job and invite us to renew our commitment to it. In the Gospel today we see that extraordinary scene, which our worship puts before us on this Sunday every year, of the disciples locked away behind closed doors on the night of Easter Sunday. Yes, cheesy though it sounds, it is lockdown for the Church on her first day!

It is a good and ancient spiritual practice to place yourself in the Gospel, to use your imagination to put yourself today right there in the room. The locked room. The room full of fear. As we engage in the worship of the Church remotely, in solitude, this is a big opportunity. Slowly read the scriptures of the day, perhaps more than once. After all, we have time! Close your eyes and put yourself into the room where the disciples were.

Into this room steps the risen Jesus, locks notwithstanding. Note how St John finishes by saying that there is so much else he could tell us, but he is only giving us this scene, because we need it. Imagine yourself meeting the risen Jesus face to face as He breathes out the meaning of the Church: “Peace be with you”. Hear the command of Jesus to go into the world for the forgiveness of sins. Hear His invitation to reconciliation and new life. Read it over a few times, maybe.

Note then the problem: Thomas isn't there. He has ignored the request to "Stay Home", if you will forgive more cheese, and cut off from the risen Jesus he is filled with typical questions and doubts - despite being filled with good intentions - until he comes back to be part of the group. It is a stark lesson about the point of our worship.

So then, on this great Easter Day, ideally at the time you know Mass is being offered, stop to worship in your "locked room", that is, the place where we are cooped up by no choice of our own. Thanks be if you have others in the house to share this with. Say clearly what Intention you offer the time of worship for, as you should remember your intention for Mass in Church. As previously mentioned, savour the scriptures slowly. Stand, perhaps, to read the Gospel. Pause and hear the words of Christ. Invite the risen Jesus into the fears that threaten to overwhelm us today. Next offer your Prayer of the Faithful. Pray for the Church. Maybe take a little tour in your imagination around the world and picture the Church there. Pray for the needs of the world, for wisdom for all people in this time of crisis. Pray for particular needs - and always remember to give thanks for graces. Pray for the souls of the departed, especially the victims of Covid-19 in their isolation. Ask the prayers of the saints...picture them and name them. Remember that the priest in Church is doing the same on your behalf. Then, make your act of contrition and of Spiritual Communion (*resources available on this website*). Rejoice that Jesus, risen from the dead, invites you to touch Him, to touch His sacred wounds, the mark of His love and has given you a vital job to do.

As the crisis of our times continues, the world needs the Church just as ever. The big question comes - How will I live these days? How will I make choices and identify priorities? How will I use this time to build up my foundations in the faith? A place to start is to use our precious time of worship in this way, united in prayer if not in unison of words and place, so as to understand what our worship is. And then make Thomas' words truly ours: "My Lord and my God" (*that would be a good moment to kneel down, or reverence a cross or holy picture*). Then, if you like, go online and share in a broadcast, so as to reflect on what you have been doing.

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a happy continuing of the Easter season. Keep safe and well, and always pick up the telephone and be in touch.