

2nd Sunday of Eastertide (C)

28th April 2019

'Resurrection & Reconciliation'

Acts 5: *signs and wonders worked ...*

Ps 117: *this day was made by the Lord*

Apoc 1: *I was dead and now I am to live for ever and ever*

Jn 20: 19–31: *Doubt no longer but believe!*

The whole reason for having a 3-year cycle of Sunday Masses (Years A/B/C) is that the readings we get to hear can be chosen from a much wider range. We sample a vaster selection of texts from Scripture, so that over the Sundays of the 3 years we actually get to hear proclaimed to us about 40% of the New Testament, which is a huge proportion, really. But some texts we get to hear more often, so that, e.g., the Gospel for Easter morning is, every year, the account of the empty tomb from St John; and this Sunday, the octave day of Easter, too, we hear the same Gospel passage each year — I suppose, because it refers to the two successive appearances of Jesus to the apostles, a week apart, on the Sunday of His rising, and on the Sunday after. This is a very important passage, of course, as Our Blessed Lord makes Himself known to those who will need the evidence of their very eyes in order to testify to His Resurrection and to spread the Gospel to the world.

What is at the heart of Jesus's Resurrection appearances? For me, it seems clear that He is not there firstly to upbraid the apostles for their scattering after His arrest in Gethsemane, or

for their betrayals and denials. His first words are of reconciliation: "Peace be with you!" — and He repeats it for emphasis, "Peace be with you!" He speaks of the gift of mercy that comes with sending them out on mission, "For those who sins you forgive, they are forgiven!" And even with 'doubting Thomas' He is not dismayed, but is able gently to bring St Thomas to a profound realisation of Resurrection faith in Jesus: "My Lord and my God!" There is a gentleness and compassion to Jesus's appearances, alongside the phenomenal physical evidence of His coming back from the dead, appearing in this new and glorious Risen body. The apostles, then, are charged with this great double mission, to witness to His Resurrection — His defeat of death — *and* to preach of His forgiveness of sins. The two come together as one package: His divine power in defeating the stranglehold of mortal death; and His divine mercy in overcoming the devil's lies about our being mired in a despair of sin. **Resurrection and Reconciliation** — these are the two key messages of the Gospel, and the Risen Lord immediately conveys this in those first appearances to the apostles — quickly this becomes His sending them out on mission, filled with the Holy Spirit.

When we think what news we were greeted with on

Easter Sunday morning from across the world in Sri Lanka, it's hard to comprehend: trying to reconcile the joy and new life of Easter with the horror and carnage of bombed churches and hotels. By far the largest number of victims were killed in the packed St Sebastian's Catholic church in Negembo — video footage shows that it was full for the celebration of Easter. And another target was the Catholic shrine of St Anthony of Padua. Despite the evil perpetrated against our fellow Catholics, yet we have to apply to these outrages the logic of Easter, and the attitude of the risen Jesus: **Resurrection and Reconciliation**. First, we pray for those who died, praying for their sharing the light and hope of the Resurrection of Jesus. Please God, those who were killed at their Easter-Sunday Mass were close to the Lord, deeply committed to Jesus, having had forgiveness of their sins in Lent or Holy Week. What keener sharing in Jesus's Passion could there be for those bomb victims than to enter into death in the company of Jesus at Mass? Thank God we know that Our Blessed Lord is the gateway to salvation and to eternal life; to die what almost amounts to a martyr's death, at Sunday Mass, is a reassurance in the midst of such worldly devastation.

And then there's Reconciliation. Sri Lanka which has endeavoured to overcome in the past decade its previous, long,

civil war cannot afford to re-enter the dead-end of strife, attack, counter-attack and revenge. And nor can any of us. And so, even mindful of the tears that were shed for the dead and maimed, yet we must still keep to the path of forgiveness, reconciliation, and praying for one's enemies. The Risen Jesus overcame hatred with the love and mercy of His divine life: He shares that with us starting from the moment of His breathing on the apostles the new life of the Spirit. If we are truly His people, His *Easter* people, then we must properly believe in the Resurrection — that this life does not make sense without orientation towards the next life — and we must live it in the exercise of constant, committed, mercy, even in the teeth of provocation and hatred. These things are sent to test us as Christians, they are a suffering that is hard to accept, but they are truly a sharing in the Passion of Jesus so that we can know what it is to rise again like Jesus, with a heart full of tenderness and forgiveness. Only one with such a heart as that can one then hope to live in eternity with the Risen Jesus in peace and happiness.