

Second Sunday of Easter
May 1, 2011

A sentence from Acts. We are in Jerusalem. Jesus has risen from the dead. He has appeared to his mother and to Magdalene, to disciples behind locked doors and on the shore of the open sea. He has returned to his Father and has sent his Spirit upon the disciples. And now the first Christians begin to live the Christ life, the life of oneness with the risen Lord.

How do they live it? Those who once walked and talked with him, those who watched him die, those who repented and were baptized, those who were filled with the Holy Spirit – how do they carry on their Christian life? Listen again to the account in Acts: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, the breaking of the bread and the prayers.” Four facets to their experience of the risen Christ.

1. *The apostles’ teaching.* The apostles’ teaching was everything Jesus had taught and all he had said to them. “Repent, and be baptized.” “Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you.” “Love one another as I have loved you.” “As you did it to one of the least of these my sisters and brothers, you did it to me.” “I live and therefore you shall live.” For the first Christians, to listen to the apostles’ teaching was to listen to Jesus’ teaching. To listen to Jesus was to listen to God.
2. *The fellowship.* What did the fellowship mean? Luke tells us a bit later: “Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common.” “There was not a needy person among them. For as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet. And distribution was made to each as any had need.” They shared what they had. Because “the other” was Christ.
3. *The breaking of bread.* The Supper of the Lord. I mean what St. Paul would write: “I received from the Lord what I delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread... broke it and said: ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’” “The bread which we break,” Paul asked, “is it not a communion in the body of Christ?” “They recognized him in the breaking of the bread.”

4. *The prayers.* The first Christians prayed together. They recalled the promise of Jesus: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." To pray was to enter the presence of God. As a lovable old spiritual director of mine put it a long time ago, "I say nothing to God, and God says nothing to me. But I look at God, and God looks at me."

All of which brings me to doubting Thomas. A fascinating fellow. Why wasn't he around on Easter Sunday, when Jesus first appeared, breathed his Spirit on the disciples, empowered them to forgive sin? What made him so skeptical when trusted friends like Peter, James and John told him "We have seen the Lord?" We don't know. What we do know is that the doubter uttered the most perfect affirmation of Christ in all of the Gospels. "Lord and God" translates the name of Israel's God. "Lord and God" would become the common Christian confession of Christ, Son of God equal to the Father. "My Lord and my God" was an act of faith. The experience took place in the midst of a community.

Christian life is life in community. We begin with a fact. Here we are, baptized, like the Jerusalem Christians, into a community, a people. "You are the body of Christ," Paul proclaims to the Christians of Corinth. But life in community demands love in community – in the very four areas the Jerusalem Christians prized.

1. The apostles' teaching is simply Jesus shaping a community mind. Difficult at times, but well worth the struggle. For this, Jesus said, "is eternal life, to know the one true God and the Christ God sent".
2. Fellowship is sharing of what we have that lightens the burden of those who experience so much of Christ's crucifixion, so little of his resurrection.
3. We too must be broken in the breaking of the bread, to be given, as Jesus was given, to a broken world.
4. We must plunge into the prayers of the community, God here present in the preached word, here present in the broken bread.

Christian faith is also a religious experience. Our faith, like Thomas' faith, is a living faith when "My Lord and my God" is the flaming response of our whole being to the risen Jesus present before us, around us, within us. When it means, "I love you, Lord, with all my soul and with all my heart and with all my mind, every stirring of my spirit." And that, dear parishioners, is an experience of God. When God and I have touched.

A living faith within a community of faith. If our faith is alive, we will touch the risen Christ as Jerusalem's first Christians touched him: in his word and in our fellowship, in the breaking of the bread and in our prayers.

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