**Notes for Next Sunday**

Second Sunday of Easter

**The Point of this Week’s Readings**

The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest miracle ever! The readings deal with praise worthy responses as well the empowerment to carry it out.

The Psalm (Psalm 148) is a call to all things in creation to praise the Lord. The reason for the call to praise is that Israel had been freed from its exile in Babylon. The Lord had forgiven their sins and set them free to once more worship Him. Easter is the greatest freeing event ever to happen! We are exiled from our sinful ways and unchained to praise and serve God.

The First Reading (Acts 4:32-35) drives home the point of how compelling the resurrection of Christ was for the early Christians. (This is why we use readings from Acts during this Easter season.) The disciples could not stop talking about Jesus’s resurrection (v. 33). That resulted in great trust among Jesus’ followers. The basis for this trust goes back to Acts 2:42-47. There we see the early Christians using the Word and Sacraments often. These two gifts empowered them to unheard of heights. These early Christians, surrounded and infused by the Word of Jesus, found new life in the grace that flowed directly from God’s heart. We still have the same powerful Word and Sacrament today.

The Epistle (1 John 1:1-2:2) is a series of three things that John wants to have his audience to know. First, John reminds them that he had shared with them what he had heard and seen concerning Jesus (1:1-4). Second, what John had passed on would lead them to walk in a “newness of life” (1:5-10). Third, John lovingly points them once more to Christ as the one who forgives all sins (2:1-2).

The Gospel (John 20:19-31) takes place on Easter evening. The disciples are still in hiding, fearful of the Jews. They may also feel incredibly guilty for having forsaken Jesus when he needed them the most. Jesus had every right to really get after them for their disgraceful behavior. INSTEAD, (one) He offers them peace, (two) He gives them a most important ministry of being sent to forgive people their sins. He does not treat us according what we deserve (which is eternal death). Instead, He gives us the peace of being forgiven and having heaven because of it.

*For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.*

**Psalm 148**

**1﻿ Praise the LORD.﻿ Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights above. ﻿2﻿ Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts. ﻿3﻿ Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. ﻿4﻿ Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. ﻿5﻿ Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. ﻿6﻿ He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away. ﻿7﻿ Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, ﻿8﻿ lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, ﻿9﻿ you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, 10﻿ wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, ﻿11﻿ kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, ﻿12﻿ young men and maidens, old men and children. ﻿13﻿ Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens. ﻿14﻿ He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his saints, of Israel, the people close to his heart. Praise the LORD.**

The psalm moves from the rational to the inanimate creatures in the heavens and then in reverse order from the inanimate to the rational on earth.

In verses 1-6 we have all creatures in the heavens praise the Lord. The angels and the heavenly bodies are often placed side by side in the Scriptures, especially in poetic parallelism. The term “heavenly hosts” may refer to either of them. Though they are the more majestic and awesome of God’s creatures they are nevertheless creations whom the psalmist summons to praise their creator.

Verses 7-12 has all creatures of earth praise the Lord. “Heaven and earth” are the sum of all creation.

Verses 13-14 are the conclusion, with a focus on motivation to praise God.

**First Reading – Acts 4:32-35**

**32﻿ All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. ﻿33﻿ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. ﻿34﻿ There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales﻿ 35﻿ and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.**

This picture is truly all the more remarkable because of all the elements for disharmony and squabbling that were present! This congregation was made up of a vast variety of people, old and young, rich and poor, with many differences in occupations, education, gifts, temperaments, etc. This is a food for serious thought for us: We have the same Word, and the same Holy Spirit stands ready and waiting to make us, too, more ready to share our blessings with those who have need of them.

A word for “testimony, witness,” was a general term for a person or message developed into the English word “martyr.” The believer put his or her life on the line—and often lost it—when he or she spoke about the Savior. Christians should not ask to be spared trials and dangers, but pray to be made strong enough to endure them. Instead of asking God to remove pressure and opposition, pray for boldness to confront the enemy.

**Epistle – 1 John 1:1-2:2**

**That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.  2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.  3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.  4 We write this to make our joy complete.**

The purpose of John’s letter is similar to that of his gospel (Jn. 20:31). It is to bring the readers into an intimate relationship with the Word of Life. By doing so they also become part of the “communion of saints” and their joy is fulfilled.

The fellowship of the church is a fellowship of “light.” The metaphor of darkness describes sin, the absence of the light of divine perfection. The Christian lifestyle requires a distinct separation from the darkness of the old life of sin under the domination of the old self. We are to walk in the light of Christ, whose blood has given us life by the forgiveness of sins.

Being a part of God’s fellowship does not imply moral perfection, but gives us the incentive to bring our sins to the one who “speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” No one is excluded from receiving God’s grace.

**Gospel – John 20:19-31**

**19﻿ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ﻿20﻿ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. ﻿21﻿ Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” ﻿22﻿ And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ﻿23﻿ If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” 24﻿ Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ﻿25﻿ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.” ﻿26﻿ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ﻿27﻿ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” ﻿28﻿ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” ﻿29﻿ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” ﻿30﻿ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ﻿31﻿ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

This reading begins on the evening of Easter with the disciples locked in a room in fear of the Jews. When Jesus appears to them, their initial reaction is greater fear still. But their fear begins to give way to the peace that Jesus brings them. A week later the disciples are once again found behind locked doors, implying that they remained fearful. Big fears go away slowly and require much encouraging. Thomas’s doubting was a symptom of his fear.

The disciples’ rejection of Jesus’ mission left them in doubt as to whether Jesus was their friend any longer. This is the beauty behind Jesus’ word “Peace.” They are reconciled! Thank God that our faithlessness does not stop Jesus from coming with His blessing of peace.

Jesus came and stood among them (v. 19). Jesus’ was now glorified and was no longer contained by time and space limitations. He could suddenly be there. John’s gospel began with the marvelous assertion that the Word, The Son of God, “became flesh and made His dwelling among us” (1:14). Now here He was again coming just as quietly as He had the first time when He was born in a stable in a quiet and insignificant village to two unimportant people, as the world counts unimportance. Standing in their midst made all the difference in the world. Now they could know and believe. Now they could listen and wait. Now Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit would come. Now they would make a difference.

Jesus “showed them his hands and side” (v. 20). He flashed his “identification badges” to establish who he was, the Teacher and Lord they had known so intimately for three years, Jesus of Nazareth. This was not an apparition produced by intense fear or mob psychology. His wounds prove that the same body that hung on the cross is now risen. For their own faith, as well as their future testimony, it was essential that the disciples positively identify him. The holy wounds of Jesus continue to bring joy and assurance to us today. They are evidence of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice.

Jesus is always reaching out and teaching. The wounds of Jesus bring joy and assurance to us today. They are proof of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Verse 22 says that Jesus breathed on the disciples. Breathing has the picture of creating something. This is Jesus’ taking fear-stricken disciples and giving them the Holy Spirit for the ministry of the “Office of the Keys” (the forgiving and retaining sins).

The apostles were to proclaim the gospel and in effect were forgiving or not forgiving sins, depending on whether the hearers believe in Jesus Christ or not. When absolution is announced in the church service the Office of the Keys is in action.

It must be recognized that the Keys belong not to the person of one particular man, but to the Church. While this is so it does not keep individual Christians comforting a fellow believer with assurance that his/her sins are in the words of Psalm 103:12, “as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”

The other disciples had repeatedly told Thomas that they had seen Jesus. He rejects the testimony of others as invalid or unreliable. How many today still reject the apostolic testimony? AND, Jesus stands ready to offer His peace for their lives.