

Easter 2

Let me suggest to you an exercise in the reading of SS. Sometime today or tomorrow open your bible to the Gospel of John and to ch. 20 of that Gospel. You will see that ch. 20 is the second last ch. of the Gospel. However, SS scholars tell us that it is actually the last ch. Ch. 21 is a later addition, an appendix.

The bible I use, the New American Bible, has headings in some of the chapters to help the reader. In ch. 20 it has four headings: the empty tomb, the appearance to Mary Magdalene, the appearance to the disciples, and the appearance to Thomas. Last Sunday, Easter Sunday, our gospel was the first part of this chapter, the empty tomb part. Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb, finds it empty, runs to tell Peter and John about this, and they run to the tomb to verify her story and find it so: the body is gone. Then this past week on Tuesday the second part of the Gospel, the appearance of Jesus to Mary at the tomb, was the Gospel. Mary has returned to the tomb to look for the Lord's body and sees a man nearby who she takes to be the gardener. She asks him if he has taken the body. When this man says her name, she recognizes him. It is Jesus. Today's Gospel contains the third and four parts of the chapter: the appearance to the disciples and a second appearance to Thomas who was absent for this first appearance.

When Thomas sees Jesus, all his previous demands (unless I see the nail marks and put my finger into the wound in his side...) fall away. He simply says, "My Lord and my God." And there and then the ch. ends with lines clearly addressed not to Thomas or the disciples but to us who read this gospel. For Jesus now says to Thomas: "Have you come to believe because you have seen? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." There we are. We have not seen but we have believed. Then the ch. ends with these words, the final words of this Gospel: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you have life in his name." There we are. These things have been written so that we, believing them, may have life in his name. Life, life, life. The Easter message.

So often our newspapers and television report death, not life. People are killed in accidents while driving. People are killed in horrible natural disasters. And people are killed by other people in wars and because of personal hatreds. Indeed, sometimes the murders take place even within a family. In some cultures a father will kill his daughter because she has married the wrong man,

someone from another cultural group. Or a woman will be killed because she has committed adultery. We thought that was something which happened only in ancient societies, as in Jesus' society, but it continues even today.

One important aspect of some of the risen Lord's appearances which can go almost unnoticed is that mercy and reconciliation are paramount in them. When Jesus appears, his greeting is often one of peace: Peace to you. But to whom is he offering this serene message? To Mary and the other women. Yes. And there it is simply that. But when he offers peace to the disciples, he is offering it to men who betrayed him. They left him. They abandoned him. And Peter did more than that. He denied him verbally three times: "I DO NOT KNOW THE MAN.

If we have ever experienced a broken relationship, if we have done something awful to someone who was a friend and then meet this person again, what is our reaction? Don't we want to avoid such a meeting? Don't we want to hide from this person? And if we have to face him or her, then to make eye contact is a most painful experience. We are ashamed. We are embarrassed. We want to look away. We want to get away as fast as we can.

But suppose we cannot get away, and suppose we see that the person we have offended is looking at us not with hatred or contempt but with kindness. Then we are overcome. We might even start to cry.

Recently the 25th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda in which almost a million people were killed within three months was commemorated. A Fr. Marcel Uwineza, a Jesuit studying here at BC, spoke at the United Nations at this commemoration. He lost most of his family, and he has met and forgiven a man who killed some of his family.

Through our public media we often learn of the reactions people have to the death of those who have committed crimes. When Whitey Bulger was killed by fellow prisoners a few years ago, one person voiced his hope that his death was slow and painful. He wanted revenge for the murder of his father by Bulger. And in the paper on Thursday it was reported that Christians in Sri Lanka (Catholic Christians, I suppose) were acting violently against their Muslim neighbors because of the Easter Sunday destruction of Catholic churches and the death of more than 300 Christians. And these killings by Muslims were in turn an act taken to avenge the

killings of Muslims in a New Zealand mosque some six months ago. And so it goes. Revenge, revenge, revenge.

But that is not the way of Jesus. And that is what we see in his appearances to his disciples who betrayed him. “Peace be with you,” Jesus says to those who betrayed him.

This is a new way of living. May we live it so that we may have life.