



Unless I put my hand to his side...

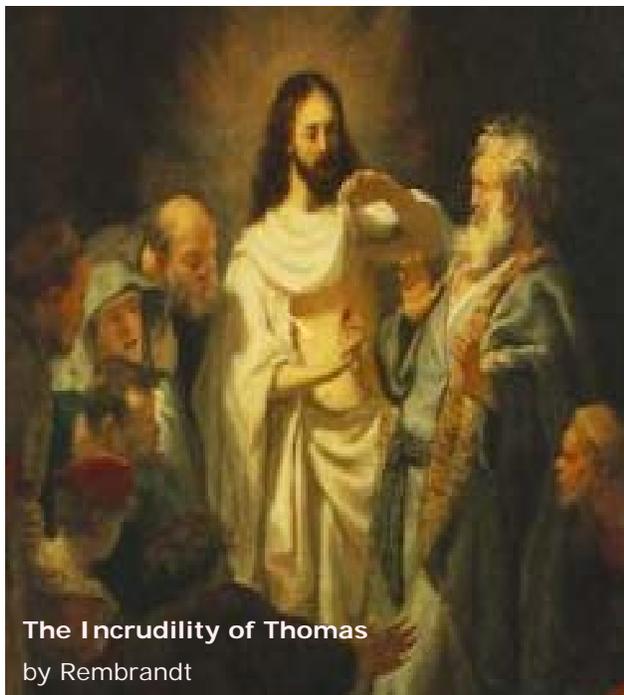


On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe."

Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you



The Incrudility of Thomas
by Rembrandt

have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

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 come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

REFLECTION: Do not be unbelieving, but believe. (John 20:27) Everyone had heard about the man who lived among the tombs, unable to be restrained (Mark 5:1-18). Surely people warned Jesus to stay away from him. Yet he continued on, filled with compassion. As they met, the man was so tormented he couldn't even ask for

help. But Jesus spoke, the demons fled, and the man was released. Divine mercy brings freedom.

As Jesus was leaving Jericho, two blind men called out to him: "Son of David, have pity on us!" (Matthew 20:29-30). People told them

to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder. They knew how much they needed him. Again, full of love, Jesus touched their eyes and restored their sight. Divine mercy brings healing.

Zacchaeus was a tax collector known for extorting money. Yet when he heard Jesus would be coming by, he was determined to see him (Luke 19:1-10). He was not deterred by his short stature but climbed a tree to get a good view. Jesus called to him, and the two shared a meal together. Divine mercy transforms lives.

This is the miracle of divine mercy: It is available to all of us right now. It is a free and boundless gift

from our Father. He has prepared a banquet hall for us, and he invites us all to come. With bold and eager hearts, not allowing unbelief to keep us away, we can enter in and receive all that he has for us.

God's mercy is a fresh, ever-rushing river. Jesus is inviting you today to immerse yourself in his cleansing tide. How great is the love that God lavishes on his children! His mercy is not earned but is given freely. So don't hesitate. Come and surrender to him, and receive the freedom, healing, and transformation that spring from the heart of Christ! ***"Father, I am awed by your compassion and love for me. Your mercy has raised me up, cleansed me, and changed me. I embrace the mercy that you are pouring over me right now."***

Mon, April 12*Acts 4:23-31; Ps 2:1-9; Jn 3:1-8*

As they prayed, the place where they were gathered shook. (Acts 4:31) What a commotion! Peter and John had just healed a lame man in front of the Temple, drawing attention to themselves and their gospel. Seeing this, the Jewish leaders became infuriated and locked them in jail for the night. But they couldn't trump up any charges against them, so they warned them never to proclaim the name of Jesus again. But Peter responded: "It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). Peter and John didn't cower.

In fact, after they were released, their first act was to tell their brothers and sisters what had happened and to ask them all to pray for the Lord to pour out his Spirit and make them even more bold. Instead of focusing on the immediate danger, they saw the big picture and trusted that God would triumph. They knew that he loved them and was empowering them to serve him. And God answered their prayer by pouring out the Holy Spirit in a way that shook the building. Note that these believers had already received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, but that didn't stop them from praying for more. In fact, this is a prayer that God loves to answer. He knows that we can always use more of his grace, and he is more than happy to give it. Sometimes we find ourselves in situations that overwhelm us: an unexpected illness, a sudden death, the loss of a job, a betrayal or disappointment. Of course our Father

wants us to come to him and pour out our grief and our confusion. Of course he loves to comfort us. But don't stop there! Ask the Holy Spirit to show you the big picture, just as the apostles did. Remember that God loves you and everyone else involved in this situation with you. Remember that he is with you and that even in the midst of this situation, he can bring great glory to his name through you. God loves to pour out more of his Holy Spirit on us! Don't be afraid to ask! And to ask again. And again.

"Lord of heaven and earth, everything is in your hands. Open my eyes to see your face. Make me bold in proclaiming your victory. Come, Holy Spirit, and give me more!"

Tues, April 13*Acts 4:32-37; Psalm 93:1-5; John 3:7-15*

The community of believers was of one heart. (Acts 4:32) Are you one of those people who like turning to the last page of a book to find out how it ends? If you are, you know what it's like to see the outcome without knowing how it actually happened. This is one way of looking at the description of the early church that we find in today's first reading. It's such an ideal picture of unity and selflessness, but we can't think that it just happened overnight. It took a combination of human dedication and divine grace.

And it took time. So how did it happen? Earlier in Acts, Luke tells us that the first Christians "devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers"

and that "every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes" (Acts 2:42,46). It was in the day-to-day living out of their faith that they grew close and developed a common mind. Holding fast to prayer and fellowship, they discovered that their lives were no longer ordinary: "Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles" (2:43). Imagine what would happen if just a few members of your parish were to try to follow the apostles' example a bit more closely. Perhaps people would be changed from churchgoers to church-sharers. People might no longer think of themselves as individuals but as brothers and sisters. Some might even reach out to the broader community in love, and lives would be changed. Why? Because love that is animated by the Spirit is contagious. It attracts people and inspires them to seek the Lord for their own lives.

Does this sound too idealistic?

It doesn't have to be. All it takes is a few people who are willing to devote time to daily prayer, to sharing their faith with each other, and to listening for the Spirit's voice. Their love will be contagious, and just as it happened in the early church, their numbers will grow. And as a result, the whole parish's light will shine!

"Holy Spirit, shine your light upon our church. Let the love you have for us draw us together so that together we can bring your grace to the world around us."

Pray unceasingly!

Wed, April 14*Acts 5:16-26; Psalm 34:2-9; John 3:16-21*

Tell the people everything about this life. (Acts 5:20)

In just a few words, this passage from Acts relates a very dramatic scene. The apostles have been thrown in prison for preaching about Jesus in the Temple area. During the night, an angel appears miraculously and releases them, with the instruction to go right back to the Temple and preach "about this life."

What is the life that the apostles were to preach? What is this life that God promises us through Jesus?

Quite simply, it is Jesus living in us. It is a life of freedom, because through Christ we are released from sin, guilt, fear, and anything else that holds us bound. It is a life of love—love that is freely given and freely accepted; love that overcomes division and builds up, not tears down. It is a life of passion—passion to spread the gospel so that others can experience the same freedom that we know. It is a life of meaning and purpose—one that brings joy because of our friendship with Jesus. And it is a life filled with hope—because we expect God to act for our good and to welcome us one day into his heavenly home.

To see this life in action, all we have to do is to look at the apostles. They lived to proclaim the gospel, and because of their expectant faith, they witnessed numerous miracles like the one in this passage. Whatever trials they encountered—persecution, prison, beatings, and exile—they never lost hope or the sense



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the lonely and marginalized. First and foremost, the kingdom of God is within you!

It's in your heart that the superabundant love of God can heal wounds and fill emptiness. It's in your heart that sinful habits can be overcome and godly virtues can be strengthened. And it's from within your heart that **God's goodness can be multiplied and start to spill out to everyone around you.**

"Father, I believe your kingdom has come. Help me to see it—in my heart, in my life, and in the lives of everyone around me!"

that it was an honor to be ambassadors of God's love and mercy.

How do we live this life that our Father has given to us in Jesus? By asking for it! Each day in prayer, surrender more of your "old" life to him, and ask him for more of his divine life in you. Believe that if you ask, you will receive it. This doesn't mean that you'll never experience suffering or sorrow. But it does mean that you will be able to respond to them with the faith and confidence that God is in control and that he will give you whatever you need to live victoriously for him.

"Jesus, I want the life that you died to give me. In faith I ask you to manifest more of your life in me."

Thurs, April 15

Psalm 34:2,9,17-20; Acts 5:27-33; John 3:31-36

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever disobeys the Son will not see life. (John 3:36) These are strong words, aren't they? John is telling his people that belief in Jesus is a life-and-death issue. What's more, it's a matter of eternal life versus eternal death—and it depends on our own choices. God has given us the freedom both to respond to his invitation and to turn away from it. At its core, the message of the gospel really is quite simple, isn't it? If we want to have eternal life, we need to believe in Jesus and do our best to follow his commandments. But as simple as it is, there are also layers of complexity to it. For example, St. Augustine used passages like this one to

teach that only a few people would make it to heaven. But another great Father of the Church, Origen, used this and other passages to teach that a great many people would be saved. In large part, it depended on how you understand the mercy of God and what it means to "believe" in the Son of God in the first place.

So what should we say, then, about this quandary? First, we really don't know how many people will go to heaven. That is something only God can determine. And second, since we don't know, we should make it one of our top priorities to testify to God's love and to the promise of salvation to everyone we know. After all, it's better to be safe than sorry—especially when it comes to matters of eternal life. If we don't share it, the gospel won't be heard, and people will miss out on all the promises of God.

Start small. Make a list of five people you know who seem far from the Lord. Intercede for them every day, asking the Lord to touch their hearts. Try also to develop a plan to reach out to them in some way. Don't sell yourself short! It is amazing how many people can be affected by the witness of one life lived in Christ. With this combination of prayer, example, and testimony, you really can see people's lives change. Who knows? You may be instrumental in saving someone from eternal death. ***"Holy Spirit, I want to share God's love with the people around me. Help me to sow the seeds of the gospel and to trust that you will cause the growth."***

Friday, April 16

Acts 5:34-42; Psalm 27:1,4,13-14; John 6:1-15

Where can we buy enough food for them to eat? (John 6:5)

One popular explanation for the multiplication of loaves and fishes is that the people were moved by Jesus' preaching and began to share the little bit of food they had brought along but were keeping to themselves. But what if this account in John's Gospel happened exactly as written? If it is real, then, this story of the miraculous feeding is a living parable that illustrates how mercy, compassion, and abundance take the place of self-interest and lack in the kingdom of God. Is it so hard to believe that Jesus really did multiply the bread and fish as a way of revealing the kingdom of God? Think about all the different ways he tried to make his followers understand that this kingdom had finally come. Why would he not use something as tangible as food for a hungry, needy crowd? Why would he not use this opportunity to show how our needs can be satisfied in this king-

dom—or how this kingdom sets us free from selfishness so that, like the apostles, we are set free to share with others what Jesus has freely given us?

This story is foundational to the gospel message precisely because it reveals the kingdom Jesus came to establish. This kingdom is not just a theory or a fairy-tale ideal. It is a concrete reality, as concrete as the bread and fish that the people ate on that day. We may not see the kingdom in fullness yet, but we do see glimpses and glimmers: in the Eucharist, in families where Jesus is honored, in vibrant parishes, and in ministries that reach out to

Easter as Opening Doors of Hell



IN EXILE

BY RON ROLHEISER

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” (Jn 20:19).

Saturday, April 17

Acts 6:1-7; Psalm 33:1-2,4-5,18-19; John 6:16-21

So they chose Stephen. (Acts 6:5) After being filled with the Spirit at Pentecost, the apostles began to proclaim the risen Lord with boldness. As a result, the infant church grew day by day. But with such rapid increase came growing pains too! One of the challenges lay in the distribution of resources that members of the church had donated for those in need: “The Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected” (Acts 6:1). At this very early stage in the church, all the believers were Jewish. However, some—the “Hebrews”—were natives of Palestine who spoke the local Aramaic and used the Hebrew scriptures in their worship. Others were Jews of the Diaspora—immigrants to Jerusalem who had been born and raised in other countries. They were called “Hellenists” because they spoke Greek and they used a Greek translation of Scripture in their worship. It seems that the “Hebrews” looked down on the “Hellenists” because they were foreigners. The apostles didn’t abandon preaching God’s word to handle this problem. Rather, they proposed that the community select reliable men to make sure that no one was overlooked. And so the church resolved its first internal crisis in a way that preserved unity and provided for the care of the needy. This sounds a bit like our church today. There aren’t enough priests to go around, and occasionally people fall through the cracks. That’s why it is important that we all keep our eyes open for those who could use some help. Both within and beyond our parish communities, there are many places where we can bring the presence of Christ—places that an everyday priest simply cannot reach. Do you feel that God is asking you to meet a special need? Don’t ignore these urgings! They may well be the beginning of a new season in your life. And like the men chosen in today’s reading, your service may lead you to become more fully empowered by the Spirit of the Lord!

“Lord, I want to say yes to your call. Help me serve your people with love and generosity. Make us all one body, Lord!”

Some years ago a young woman I knew, a university student, fell into a severe depression and attempted suicide. Her family, startled by what had happened, rallied around her. They brought her home and for the next few months tried to provide her with all the best that medicine, psychiatry, the church, and human love could offer. They tried everything, but they couldn’t penetrate the dark hole into which she had descended.

Four months later she killed herself. She had descended into a private hell into which nothing on this side of eternity could any longer enter. She was powerless to open up her own soul for help. I suspect that many of the reasons for her depression were not her fault. She didn’t will herself into that paralysis, circumstance, wound, and bad health put her there. All of us know similar stories.

What’s to be said about this? Does our faith have any answers?

There is a particular line in the Apostles’ Creed which is deeply rooted in the Gospels that does throw light, major light, on this issue. It’s the phrase: He descended to the dead. Or, in some versions: He descended into hell. What is contained in that phrase is, no doubt, the most consoling doctrine in all of religion, Christian or otherwise. What it tells us is that the way Jesus died and rose opened up the gates of death and of hell itself. What does that mean?

This is not a simple teaching. There are different layers of meaning inside of it. At one level, it expresses a Christian belief (which itself needs much explanation) that from the time of the fall of Adam and Eve until Jesus’ death, nobody, no matter how virtuous his or her life might have been, could enter heaven. The gates of heaven were shut and could be opened only by Jesus through his death.

There is an ancient Christian homily (now part of the Office of Readings for Holy Saturday) which paints a picture of this as you might see depicted on an icon. It describes both why nobody could go to heaven before Jesus’ descent into the underworld and how Jesus, once there, wakes up Adam and Eve, and leads them through a now open door to heaven. But that’s an icon, not a literal picture.

The Gospels insert this into a wider concept. In the Gospel of Mark, for instance, we see that is important that Jesus goes into every dark, taboo place on this planet and take God’s light and healing there. Thus Jesus goes into morally taboo places, the singles bars of his time. But he also goes into all other dark, taboo places, particularly into sickness and death. And, for first-century Judaism, there was no place more taboo than death itself. The belief was that human beings were created to enjoy God’s presence in this life and not to die. Death was seen as an evil, the consequence of sin, an alienation from God, a place separated from heaven, with no door in between. Hence to say that Jesus “descended to the dead” was the same as saying he “descended into hell”. All of the dead were considered as separated from God.

One of our major beliefs about Jesus is that, by entering death, he precisely entered this underworld, this Sheol, this place of separation and alienation, this “hell”, and, once there, breathed out God’s light and healing in the same way as, in John’s Gospel, he went through doors that were locked by fear and breathed out peace and forgiveness. By going through locked doors and breathing out peace, he both descends into hell and opens up the gates of heaven.

And this is not something abstract, a creedal statement to be believed. It is still happening. There are many forms of death, Sheol, the underworld, hell. Suicidal depression, incurable bitterness, a wound so deep it can never heal, helplessness inside of a life-destroying addiction, a beaten and crushed spirit, an alienation too deep and long-standing to be overcome, any of these

Power of the Resurrected Christ at work in His Church

Reading I: Acts 5:12-16

Here is a vignette of the apostles' ministry in the early community after Pentecost. It shows the power of the risen Christ at work in his Church. The apostolic preaching is not mentioned here, but there are never signs and wonders without the proclamation of the word.

The phrase "were added to the Lord" is very striking. New converts were "added," that is, they were brought into an already existing community. They did not hear the message and get together to form a community of their own; the community was already there.

And they "were added"—a reverential passive denoting that it was God who added them; it was not the Church that added new members. The new converts did not become members on their own, but God translated them into the redeemed community.

Resp Psalm: 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

Psalm 118, with its reference to the rejection of the stone and its subsequent elevation to be the chief cornerstone, was perhaps the earliest Old Testament passage that the primitive community applied to Christ's death and resurrection.

It was the basic Old Testament passage for the "no-yes" interpretation of the death

can leave us huddled in a locked room, in some underworld, in some private hell, too weak to open the doors that lead to love and life. The gates of heaven close for many reasons.

That was the case for the young woman described above who killed herself. She was in Sheol. But, I don't doubt for a second, when she woke on the other side Christ came through her locked doors, stood gently inside of her private hell, and breathed out peace. In that ancient homily describing Jesus' descent into hell, as Jesus wakes up Adam he says to him: I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell. . . . Arise, let us leave this place! No doubt this is what Jesus said too to this young woman, and then he opened the gates of heaven for her just as he once opened those same gates for Adam and Eve.



SCRIPTURE IN DEPTH

**BY REGINALD
H. FULLER**

and resurrection: the death of Jesus as Israel's (and all humankind's) "no" to Jesus, and the resurrection as God's vindication of him, his "yes" to all that Jesus had said and done and suffered during his

earthly life.

Reading II: Rev 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19

This is the opening vision of the Apocalypse, in which John the Seer sees the risen Christ and receives the messages for the seven churches. Some have held that this vision was a continuation of the post-resurrection appearances.

It is true that the language of the vision is used about the original appearances (1 Cor 15:3-8), and that in the earliest tradition the appearances were appearances "from heaven" (Paul; Mark; Matt 28:18; John 21) rather than massive apparitions of a Christ still on earth, as in the later tradition (Luke 24; John 20).

But Paul (1 Cor 15:8) is emphatic that the appearance to himself on the road to Damascus was last, not only in date but as a matter of principle. Paul himself had later visions of the risen Christ (2 Cor 12:1-4; note that there he pictures himself as being transported to heaven, rather than the risen Christ as appearing from heaven upon earth). Moreover, the resurrection appearances were revelations that formed the Church and gave it its mission in the world.

Subsequent visions, like those of Paul in 2 Cor 12:1-4 and of John the Seer in our reading today, only continue what was begun at Easter. The auditory element here repeats, but does not add to, the original Easter revelations: Christ reveals himself as alive out of death.

Gospel: John 20:19-31

This, the traditional gospel for this Sunday, describes two appearances: to the disciples on Easter evening, which appears in various forms in Matthew, Luke, and here; and to Thomas a week later, which is peculiar to John.

The element of doubt, which characterized the appearance tradition almost from the beginning and which proves that the appearances were not merely wish-fulfillment, has here been expanded for apologetic purposes, enabling the risen One to establish his identity.

The earlier tradition had pictured the risen One in more spiritual terms; this later emphasis on the physical reality of the risen body preserves the truth of the identity amid-change between the earthly Jesus and the resurrected One.

John, however, has given this story his own twist by taking up a concern of the later Church. How could a person believe in the risen One without having received an appearance? Answer: Seeing him is no guarantee of believing.

Even disciples had to come to faith when they saw him; so those who have not seen him can still have the blessedness of faith through believing the testimony of the first witnesses.

Forgiveness

“As the Father sent me, so I send you.”

Everywhere the apostles went after the resurrection, they seem to have carried the message, “Peace be with you.” Despite resistance to their proclamation of the Messiah, they found new power to work signs and wonders. The sick were cured, the troubled were healed.

The events of Christ’s Passion, death, and Resurrection were the sign of his undying ascendancy over every threat of worldly dominion. Revelation’s rhapsody played through their zeal.

“There is nothing to fear. I am the first and the last and the one who lives. Once I was dead but now I live—forever and ever.”

We are led by the Gospels’ resurrection accounts to think that such confidence was not there from the start. The followers of Jesus, despite the reports of his rising, were locked in a hidden enclave, struck with fear.

THE WORD ENGAGED

By JOHN KAVANAUGH

It is in this context that the final appearance of Jesus occurs in the body of the fourth Gospel. His words, twice spoken, brought the peace that the disciples would later proclaim to others, for he was sending them to bring good news just as the Father had sent him. “Peace be with you.” Then he breathed on them and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive others’ sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound.”

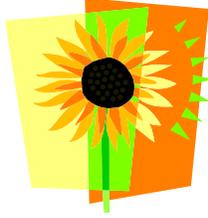
Forgiveness, and the peace that comes with it, is one of the great themes of Jesus’ mission. By this he was not only announced to the world; it was also his final gift. In his teachings, he called us to forgive seventy times seven times, and he fashioned parables of lavish pardon. Forgiveness was portrayed as so central to our lives that it was almost as if our refusal to forgive could somehow harden our hearts. The unforgiving heart languishes unforgiven, incapable of receiving forgiveness.

The prayer Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount instructs us to say, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” We say it at every eucharistic liturgy, as we prepare for Communion. Have you ever been struck by the irony in the way we can so effortlessly receive the body of Christ, having prayed the Our Father, while we carry clinkers of resentment in our spirits? I wonder if that is why the power of the Eucharist seems so diminished in us.

We walk heavily to the altar, unaware of the surging mystery around us. If we only believed the words: “Lord, I am not worthy, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” This asking for and giving of pardon will unlock something in us. Forgiveness frees. Without it, we are stuck, caught, bound down.

Have you ever heard a father, knotted with rage, say through clenched teeth, “I will never forgive my child”? Have you ever seen a wife, heavy with invisible chains, say, “I will never forgive him again.” I can remember nights spent, dry and restless, after having wounded another, in such stark contrast to those evenings when I had the courage not to let the sun fully set upon my anger. I can remember dawns, awakening with the dusty grind of being held unforgiven by another. I woke brittle, like honey gone hard. Unwillingness to forgive is something we carry like a weight. The whole world becomes heavier as we become sterner.

But there is a lightness, a suppleness, in forgiveness. Breathing is easier, fresher. When we forgive, we tap perhaps the deepest of our



Questions for Bible Study

By ANNE OSDIECK, SAINT LOUIS CENTER FOR LITURGY

Acts 5, Verses 12-16

A large number of people . . . gathered, bringing the sick and those disturbed by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.

1. What is the connection between all these life-giving miracles and the resurrection? Discuss the apostles’ missionary efforts in the light of “Power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians [12:9-10](#), [13:4](#)). Do you want Christ to use you on behalf of others? If yes, what are the implications?

2. “They were all cured.” What are some signs and wonders of God’s healing love that you see today?

Second Reading

Revelation 1, Verses 9-11, 12-13, 17-19

1. Once, when John the Evangelist is “caught up in spirit,” Christ touches him and speaks to him. Are there others in history, “suffering for their faith,” who have received clear understanding and revelations? Can good things come from suffering?

2. John says he fell down “as though dead.” Christ, “who once was dead but now is alive,” touched him and raised him up. Does this vision give you strength to do good things? Are you part of what, in Christ’s words, “will happen afterwards”?

John 20, Verses 19-31

1. Why do you think Jesus breathed on the disciples when he gave them the Holy Spirit? What effect did this have on the disciples’ fear? How about your fear, and every aspect of your life? What do forgiveness of sin and resurrection have in common?

2. How do you resolve your questions/doubts? What is your attitude toward people who, like Thomas, doubt some truths that you hold dearly? How did Jesus handle Thomas and his doubts?

powers, to create something new out of nothingness.

When we are forgiven, it is as if the world no longer wars. Demilitarized zones are unneeded. The suspicious, tentative glance disappears, and the delicate balance of power dissolves. Disarmament occurs. “Peace I give to you.”

Yet peace, like forgiveness, must be received with open hands. The only way to get unstuck is to be lifted up and out. So it is with the mystery of the Lord’s passover. God’s love for us, even in our sinful state, is there for the asking if we only believe. We must accept the lavish gift we have not earned. And the more deeply we receive his gift, the more freely we give it. Once we are filled by forgiveness from God, we know how appropriate it is to offer it to others without their earning it.

The Apostles, notwithstanding the shame and the fear, finally believed this. All is made right: wounds, loss, confusion. And having tasted the sweet abundant joy, there was no other choice but to shout it to the heavens, to bring it to the nations, to share it with an incredulous world.

The fruit of the Resurrection was their community of faith, hope, and love, their church of Jesus’ way. Word eventually got around: “See how they love one another.”