

Second Sunday of Easter – A-
April 3, 2005

Church- I go back to the question that I asked last week – Either Christ rose from the dead or he didn't? If he didn't we are the biggest of all fools but if he did we are the happiest of all people.

I ask you church – what does your experience teach you? Does your experience support the idea that Jesus rose from the dead? Or does your life seem to say to you that you are waiting for the resurrection. The sign that the Lord gives is one of peace – and a belief that no matters what happens- no obstacle is too large for Christ – after all –did he not conquer sin and death. If he rose from the dead, don't you think that he can be there with you with your problems?

The heart of the peace Jesus came to give is found in the forgiveness of sins. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry we heard, "Repent and believe the good news." His first words after Peace be with you are about the forgiveness of sins.

20:21 [Jesus] said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

20:22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

20:23 Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

The power to forgive sins is given to the early church in the persons of the disciples. These are Jesus' first words to the disciples and he indicates that the saving action of the cross will be manifested in the life of the church and, as we understand it – in the sacrament of reconciliation or what we know as confession. The forgiveness of sins is placed squarely in the life of the church – it is an important part of the ministry of the church.

I often hear why do I have to tell my sins to a man – why can't I just go to God. There are several things to consider:

- 1) Sin is never just personal – sin always affects the community in some way. Sin has a social component and often destroys the peace that Christ has spoken about. (Stealing, lying, murder, coveting, disrespect, etc.)
- 2) If sin is social then forgiveness has a social dimension- peace and pardon is given by the priest, the minister of the community, in the name of Christ for the community.
- 3) In former years this was more easily seen because penance was public and after the period of penance the priest in the name of Christ and of the community – would offer forgiveness.
- 4) A reason why so many have trouble with confession is that start with the premise that it is between me and my God. – Unfortunately that is not biblical and contradicts the scripture and the early life of the church.
- 5) When we sin, it is as members of the Body of Christ, and so we must be forgiven in the same way. The priest is an agent of the church and speaks in the name of Christ.

It is clear from the second reading today, that the early church was a communal experience.

2:42 They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.

2:43 Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

2:44 All who believed were together and had all things in common;

2:45 they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need.

St. Paul in his teaching calls the Church – the body of Christ –

[1 Cor 12:27] Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it.

We are connected to one another – just as the Tower of Babel dispersed people – we are brought back together in the Body of Christ – one member affecting the other.

1 Cor 12:14] Now the body is not a single part, but many.

[1 Cor 12:15] If a foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body.

[1 Cor 12:16] Or if an ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body.

[1 Cor 12:17] If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

Sin is forgiven in the context of the church. The church is formed around the presence and the power of Jesus. Salvation has always been offered in the context of the church. It was only with the Protestant Reformation was the individual placed before the community. The idea began, me and my God. Revelation was private and we were saved because we said we were saved. The emphasis was placed on the individual and we see the sprouting up of many different faiths and practices.

Couple this with the American individualism that exists

- I can make it on my own,
- I don't need anyone to tell me what to do-
- who does he think he is –
- attitude and church by television,
- drive through church,
- I can be a good Christian and still not be a member of Church –
- they are all hypocrites in the church,
- I read my scripture (and we give it the interpretation we want –often lacking the knowledge and understanding that it needs)

If we used the analogy of sports or dance, we would see how foolish these positions are:

I don't need any help – I can play it on my own
Who does the coach think he is anyway?
I don't need anyone to tell me what to do
I play football by watching on TV
I'll drive to the game and go by it
I can be a good football player in my house by myself
Those who play the game are lousy anyway
I can read the playbook and figure it out myself.

What type of player would he be?

What type of Christian are you?

We need to be renewed in our faith? We need to step back and look at what we are doing? We need to take time for our God? We need to get our priorities straight? We need to be about God's business.

It starts before you leave home

- Are you getting ready to give?
- It continues when we come to church, on time, ready and willing to participate.
- - if we are habitually late – let's make a change in our lives – let us show God and his body some respect.
- It continues when we honor the request of the ushers.
- It is made evident when we open our mouths in prayer and in song. – we understand what we mean when we say – we have not come to entertain-
- It continues when we listen attentively to the word of God and ask ourselves what is the Lord saying to me today through the priest and his word.
- It is made manifest when we give our fair share in the collection –returning to God our tithe –realizing all we have comes from our God.
- It is shown when we pray reverently through the Eucharistic Prayer and we understand that when we come to communion – we receive the Lord himself. We hold out our hands to make a throne for the Lord and respond with an Amen.
- We thank God for the blessings we have received. We leave to serve the Lord and to tell others of the wonderful things our God has done for us. We leave to serve.

Yes, Church the Lord is risen, as he said, yes church he is alive in this place, in this church, at this moment –he wants to know are you alive in him – are you alive in him- are you alive in him