

gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation, that He exists.

Blaise Pascal, 1623–1662

Related topics

For further study:

Death/resurrection/paschal mystery; sacraments; eucharist; confirmation; baptism; symbols: bread, water, oil; mystery of the church

Closing Prayer

God, our salvation,
you have created this day for joy
in the One you have exalted
as firstborn from the dead.
Throughout these days of Easter,
open the hearts of your people
to the Holy Spirit he has breathed upon us,
and send us out to make known
the forgiveness and peace
we have received in Jesus,
for in glorious and undying life,
he is one with you and the Holy Spirit,
now and for ever.

Celebrating the Christian Year · Easter 2, Year C²

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² *Celebrating the Christian year : prayers and resources for Sundays, holy days and festivals, years A, B and C / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-5.*

The Second Sunday of Easter

Principal Service readings

Acts 5.27-32

Peter speaks to the Sanhedrin about obedience to God

Psalm 118.14-29

The Lord is my strength and my song

or Psalm 150

Let every living thing praise God

Revelation 1.4-8

Greeting, and praise for Jesus Christ, first-born from the dead

John 20.19-31

Post-resurrection appearances to the disciples

The reading from Acts must be used.

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Post-resurrection appearances to the disciples

¹⁹When it was evening on the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told 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 in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' ²⁸Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' ²⁹Jesus said to him,

‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

John 20.19-31 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

The scene switches from Mary Magdalene and Jesus in the garden to ‘where the disciples had met’ (20.19). The time is the evening of the first day of the week, resurrection day. Despite having heard Mary’s message (20.18), the disciples are still fearful (20.19). The reader is not told who is present or how many people are there.

Jesus comes into this situation proclaiming his peace (20.19). It may be a traditional greeting but it recalls Jesus’ promises of 14.27 and 16.33. Despite the locked doors, Jesus enters, an indication of his victory over the limitations of the physical world. However, doubt is still possible among the disciples. Is this really the Jesus who had been crucified? The disciples need proof. Jesus shows them the marks of the wounds in his hands and side. They rejoice as their hopes are confirmed (20.20). He tells them that they are to be bearers of the good news of his victory (20.21).

What will help them to achieve this task is the Holy Spirit, which Jesus breathes on them. He has already ‘handed over’ his Spirit at his death (19.30). Now again he gives the Spirit. By his divine presence in his disciples (14.16), he gives them the authority to forgive sin (20.23).

There is no indication of a change of time or place, it is still the upper room on the first day. However, Thomas was not there. He had not been part of hearing Mary’s message, or of witnessing the appearance of the risen Jesus. His fellow disciples try to communicate their Easter faith to him, but he is only prepared to lay aside his doubt if his criteria are met (20.25). A week later the disciples are again in the same house, and Jesus stands among them (20.26b). Perhaps surprisingly Jesus agrees to

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meet Thomas’ conditions, and shows the marks of the nails and spear, but he asks Thomas to lay aside his doubt and to believe (20.27). Thomas then accepts the challenge of faith and says: ‘My Lord and my God’ (20.28). Scholars differ in their evaluation of this act of faith. Some see it as the supreme expression of faith, others look at Jesus’ subsequent statement: ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe’ (20.29) as showing a greater quality of faith.

John’s story of Jesus opened with information about who Jesus was and what he did (1.1-18). The story of Jesus has developed and been particularly concerned with relating how Jesus was who he was and how he achieved his mission. We can see that the author’s main concern is about the faith of the reader (cf. 19.35). The narrator resumes directly addressing the reader at the end of the book. The first disciples were challenged to go beyond the doubts and partial faith into genuine belief (20.1-29). Now we are told that those who believe without seeing might similarly go further in their belief in Jesus (20.30-31).

Quotations

1

A man’s real belief is that which he lives by. What a man believes is the thing he does, not the thing he thinks.

George Macdonald, 1824–1905

2

You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you.

C. S. Lewis, 1898–1963

3

We can’t have full knowledge all at once. We must start by believing; then afterwards we may be led on to master the evidence for ourselves.

St Thomas Aquinas, 1225–1274

4

Belief is a wise wager. Granted that faith cannot be proved, what harm will come to you if you gamble on its truth and it proves false? If you