

St Mary's Concord

A Reflection for the Second Sunday of Easter

This reflection is on the readings for the Second Sunday of Easter (Year A): Acts 2:42-47; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31.

To contain the spread of the COVID-19 Pandemic all churches remain closed. If you have not already done so, please take a few minutes to read John 20:19-31.

Every day as we watch the latest reports about the spreading of the pandemic, we are very conscious that a transformation is taking place around the world. Our experience has not been as dramatic as that of the people of Milan, London or New York, yet all of us have been affected by the need to stay at home.

On Easter Sunday, as we reflected on Matthew's account of the resurrection, we saw that Matthew's insight was that the resurrection of Jesus brought about a transformation. All humanity, and in fact the whole of creation, had entered a new reality.

Jesus in Matthew's Gospel called that reality the Kingdom of Heaven. We believe that we are already sharing in that transformation. Yet the fulfilment of our new relationship with God is still to be accomplished.

If we need to be reminded, the pandemic has brought home to us that we are still living in a fragile world where we are not in control of our own destiny.

Human beings have constantly struggled to make sense of human frailty whether at a very personal level or on a global scale. The story is retold every day in a hundred different ways and the essential element is that we alone cannot change our human condition. That can only happen through some intervention that brings about a transformation.

A traditional fable like the story of Cinderella is a classic example. We are presented with a scene of human suffering and injustice. A young woman is oppressed and abused by her stepmother until her "fairy godmother" intervenes. Only then is Cinderella able to go to the ball and to meet the prince and although there are still obstacles to be overcome, there is a happy ending.

To understand the story we need to enter into the struggles and dreams of the human heart. The story is about hope. Hope that life can be better, that there will be a happy ending. It is the hope that our individual and collective stories of pain, suffering and fear are not the final chapter.

In the face of isolation and fear we need to support each other. We can hold on to our hope when we share our dreams and our faith. One important way that we have done that in the past is by gathering each Sunday to share in the Eucharist.

The refrain of David Haas' hymn, *The Song of the Body of Christ*, captured that shared journey: "We come to share our story, we come to break the bread, we come to know our rising from the dead."



At present we cannot physically gather to break the bread, to share in the celebration of the Eucharist but we can still share our story. In part we do that by continuing to listen to the Word of God.

The stories of the early Christian communities are recorded in the writings of the New Testament and we keep coming back to those familiar stories to help us to understand our story.

The readings we listen to in the Easter season are about hope. On this Second Sunday of Easter the second reading from the *1st Letter of Peter* speaks of the new birth we have received in Baptism. In the first reading from the *Acts of the Apostles* we are presented with Luke's portrait of the early Christian community in Jerusalem.

The appearance of the risen Jesus to the disciples in the Gospel reading (Jn 20:19-31) is also about hope and about transformation. The disciples had shut themselves away in fear and suddenly Jesus is with them. His greeting, "Peace be with you", echoes the gift he promised them at the Last Supper when he told them not to be afraid (Jn 14:27-28). He brings about a transformation through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the next scene that takes place a week later, Thomas, who had not shared their earlier experience and wanted his own proof, is also convinced when he encounters the risen Jesus. But the final message is for all of us, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

We already share in the transformation that is taking place and yet we are often like Thomas. We want to see the transformation on our own terms. Instead, we need to trust that the Spirit has been given to us and is at work in the world.

Is there a happy ending? We believe there is. We believe that light conquers darkness and life conquers death.

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