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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 43: 04/12/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass. Since this Sunday marks the first week after Easter, today's readings focus on the events that occurred immediately after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Since the grave could not hold Jesus, if we have faith in Him, we can trust that someday we too will rise from the dead with an incorruptible body. This week, we begin with the Gospel lesson to accentuate some themes that emerged from Saint John's message. Then we will move on to the first reading from the Book of Acts and conclude with the second from First Peter, a study that will continue for the next several weeks.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from the Gospel of Saint John. The context is just the evening of the day we call Resurrection Sunday, or Easter. Mary Magdalene had just told the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead.

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Gospel Reading:

> *19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and *said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." 30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:19-31)*

The focus of the reading was Thomas' doubt and then his subsequent faith upon physically experiencing the resurrected Christ. As we saw in the second reading, Jesus proclaimed a blessing upon those who have not seen but yet have believed "v. 27d-e." The key point of the passage, though, was stated in the last two verses. "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" vv. 30-31).

Several other points can be drawn from the text. First, notice that Jesus entered the room without knocking, without even opening the door; He just walked right through the wall! Talk about a grand entrance, and it's no wonder the disciples were scared. The point is that Jesus had supernatural powers in His new, resurrected, and glorified body. Second, although Jesus' resurrection body was different in its capabilities, there was a one-to-one correspondence between Jesus' body that was crucified and laid in the grave and His resurrected body. Jesus' appearance to the disciples in His resurrection body served as a foretaste of the body that all believers will receive one day when Jesus

returns. Jesus will be forever recognizable by the scars He received during His earthly lifetime. Though we will never be God, we will become like Him. Saint John said, "We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2b). Third, since it was before the sending of the Holy Spirit the disciples were "in fear of the Jews" (v. 19c). This contrasted greatly with what we read about the disciples and first believers in the first reading. Though we may fear those that persecute us, we, like the early Church, have the Holy Spirit of God living in us to give us boldness and hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). Finally, Jesus was gentle with Thomas even though he expressed doubt among circumstances that we may consider compelling for him to believe. Since Jesus treated Thomas with such concern, even though he doubted Him, we can be sure that Jesus walks with us through the seasons of our own doubt.

Jesus bore the scars of His torture and crucifixion even after His resurrection. Although we don't know to what degree **we** will bear the scars of our own humiliation from men upon the earth, we can be certain that God will use our scars as an eternal testimony of our deliverance from the powers of darkness. We can rest assured that "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Chapter 2 of the Book of Acts. This Book was written by Luke, a physician and close companion of Saint Paul, as a continuation of the Gospel in his name. Luke said in the opening chapter of Acts, "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen" (Acts 1:1-2). When Doctor Luke said, "the first account," he was referring to the Gospel of Luke that he addressed to a certain man named Theophilus. Luke's "orderly account" (Luke 1:3) presented in his Gospel record included exact details concerning the birth and life of Jesus and continued all the way to Jesus' ascension to heaven (Luke 24:51). The Book of Acts retraces just a bit back to the point where Jesus promised He would soon send the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The overall time frame of the events recorded in Acts was from the beginning of the disciples' apostolic ministry to the world and concluding with Paul's arrest and subsequent journey to Rome for his trial.

A lot had happened by the time we reach the end of chapter 2 where we pick up with today's reading. Jesus had already been taken up to heaven in a cloud (Acts 1:9). Afterwards, Peter

addressed a gathering of about 120 believers (Acts 1:15) to explain how Judas' betrayal of Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and then appointed the traitor's replacement. Lots were cast, and Matthias was chosen to hold the twelfth seat (v. 26). The Day of Pentecost had come, and the promised gift of the person of the Holy Spirit had been sent (2:1-3). This event launched the full-scale ministry of the apostles to the Jews, which later extended to the Gentiles and the whole world. As you read the text, try to imagine the whirlwind of events that had just happened.

First Reading:

> *42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)*

The Church at this point was largely communal and marked by the lavish outpouring of God through spiritual gifts and miracles. Though the disciples (except for John) had previously fled from Jesus during his arrest now, they ministered with magnificent boldness and power through the Spirit of Jesus that lived inside of them (1 Peter 1:11). First, note that their worship continued in the temple, which was the former site of persecution by the same people that had put Jesus to death on the cross. Peter said that they "had favor with all the people" (v. 47a). Second, the number of believers began to expand exponentially, from just 11 to 3,000 in a very short time. "And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (v.47b). Third, the Church began the regular celebration of communion to remember Jesus (v. 46b). Each time we take communion, we join in the same celebration held by this first group of Jesus' believers. Finally, there was a special emphasis placed upon the ministries of preaching (prophecy), fellowship, communion, prayer, and giving. Peter said, "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (v. 42).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we transition to the second reading, review the ministries that marked the Early Church: preaching, fellowship, communion, prayer, and giving. Can you see how the Church has incorporated all of these foundational elements into each worship service?

The second reading is from the Epistle of First Peter, in which Saint Peter addressed groups of believers dispersed throughout Asia Minor who were undergoing persecution and losing hope in the promises of Christ. Peter addressed the book to "those who [were] elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (First Peter 1:1). Peter told them, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you" (4:12). Peter told them that they were sharing in the sufferings of Jesus Christ so that when Jesus returned they may "rejoice with exultation" (v. 13).

At the time of this writing, many in the world are suffering for their testimony of Jesus Christ. In fact, many report that there is currently more persecution happening to Christians around the world than has existed at any time since Jesus began the Church. Saint Paul warned, "evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13). This reality was being lived out in the church in Asia Minor and is not much different from what Christians experience around the world today. This reading marks the beginning of a study of 1 Peter that will continue for the next several weeks.

Second Reading:

> *3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:3-9)*

Peter said that God had caused believers to be "**born again** to a living hope through the

resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (v. 3b, emphasis added). The word "again" in the original is different from the word Jesus used in His discussion with Nicodemus in John 3:3, when He said, "You must be born again (or from above, depending upon your Bible version)." In John's Gospel, Jesus used a different word to create wordplay, providing a dual meaning of "again" and "from above." Peter, on the other hand, used a word that specifically meant "again." Peter said in effect that a believer is born spiritually (a second type of birth) through God's great mercy to "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (v. 3b).

Why all the fuss about the meaning of a particular word? Peter's point was that, through evidence of a person's spiritual birth, a person has hope in the reality of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. By this time (~ mid-60's AD), the Church had reached the point that many were not direct witnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter said, "Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls" (vv. 8-9). Peter said that although the people whom he addressed weren't eyewitnesses to Jesus, they still had the hope that Jesus' resurrection provided for all believers. Just because they were experiencing persecution and weren't of the class of the "super apostles" (see 2 Corinthians 11:5), they weren't inferior Christians (v. 6).

An important contrast exists between the Gospel lesson and the first reading from the Book of Acts. Did you notice that before the Holy Spirit was given, the disciples were fearful, then after the Holy Spirit came (Acts 2), they were ministering with a new sense of fervor? The presence of the Holy Spirit in one's life is what makes the difference between the cowering disciples and the bold disciples. Same people, different power source. Before, all they had was their willpower – and as we know, it wasn't enough to keep them faithful to Jesus as He went to Calvary. However, now they had the presence of God's Spirit Himself living inside them, giving them a new strength that went beyond their own.

I experienced something similar to this contrast through an event that happened to me some years ago. Before I had truly placed my faith in Jesus Christ, I was striving to be a good, moral person. I knew right from wrong and tried hard to live up to the biblical standards that I heard about in Sunday Mass each week. However, I found that I did not have the strength to say no to the world's ways, even when I knew it was wrong. I remember a turning point when God gave me the power to say no in a certain situation, when a friend was trying to use me to participate in some shady dealings. While I technically wasn't doing anything wrong, he was, and wanted me to join in with him. Each time I had joined him in the past, I had felt horrible about it, but I didn't have the power to tell him no. That was until I gave my life to Jesus Christ, and God's power came into my life through the Holy Spirit living inside of me. On a particular evening, God orchestrated a series of

events that finally gave me the power to tell my friend Noah.

How about you? Meditate for a moment about a time when you felt torn between choosing to do something for God versus something that the world called you to do. How did you deal with the tension? Regardless of what you chose, can you look back on this particular event in your life and see how God could have orchestrated these circumstances in order to reveal His glory to you?

Reflection Questions

1. Even Mother Teresa, when confronted with the suffering of millions of people in Calcutta, seemingly expressed doubts during certain seasons of her life. Have you ever experienced a season of doubt during your Christian life? How did you deal with it? In light of what you studied in the Book of Acts, how can you tap into God's power source to deal with such events in the future?

2. We challenge you during the upcoming week to make a commitment to pray. Pray specifically that God would reveal to you one way in which you can testify to or pray for a person whom you sense is experiencing doubts in their faith. Write their name on a card and commit to praying for them at a certain time at least once this week. Second, if you are bold enough, reach out to this person and let them know you have been praying for them.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 45: 04-27-2025

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we open with a reading from the earliest history of the church, the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, relating their ministry in the very first weeks of the newly created Church after Pentecost and the Holy Spirit's descent upon those earliest believers. The second reading is from the last Book of the New Testament, the Revelation of Jesus, as given to the last of the apostles, John. John records the vision he received of the Lord Jesus, which serves both as a warning to the Church of Jesus Christ and as an introduction to the revelation of the final events in earthly history and into eternity. The Gospel reading, interestingly enough, is from the same author who recorded the Revelation. The chapter in this week's assignment includes the miraculous appearance of Jesus and significant teaching about faith and believing in Him.

Introduction to the First Reading:

By the fifth chapter of Acts, the early Christians (and the number had grown to the thousands, Acts 2:41, 47) were demonstrating the love that Jesus said would be the mark of His disciples (John 13:34). They met together for worship and gave generously to the needs of others in the Christian family. Today's reading tells of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit working through His chosen people.

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First Reading:

> *Acts 5:12-16 NAS95 12 At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. 13 But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. 14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, 15 to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. 16 Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.*

"Signs and wonders" were miraculous events that not only brought healing to many but, more importantly, served to authenticate the authority of the apostles, those who were sent by God to do His work and to lay a foundation for the establishing of His church on earth, the body of called-out believers (that's what the New Testament word for church means). The early Christians "were all with one accord," meeting near the Temple. Jesus had prayed (John 17) that His followers would be united to be as one as He and the Father were One. Nothing has hurt the church's image so much as its disunity over centuries and even today.

Verse 13 is perplexing. Perhaps it suggests that non-believers did not associate with believers, though they highly respected them. Maybe they knew about the couple, earlier in chapter 5, who tried to deceive the apostles, claiming to give the gains from selling their property to people in need while keeping a part for themselves. They were stricken to death immediately, and the church learned the seriousness of deceitfulness and lying. That could explain why non-believers stayed away.

The remaining verses testify to the miraculous healing power of the apostles. Throughout the Book of Acts, these men of God gave testimony that the power was not theirs but the work of Jesus, whom the religious leaders had rejected. Succeeding chapters will reveal the great price true believers often had to pay to remain true to their faith. Yet, they counted it as nothing compared to what they had in Jesus and would ultimately enjoy with Him (2 Corinthians 4:17).

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Introduction to the Second Reading:

John is the last of the apostles who had traveled with Jesus, witnessed His crucifixion, and fellowshipped with Him after His resurrection. In exile, John received a vision of the Lord Himself. What he writes is so important that Jesus told him, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it." That in itself is enough reason to study this Book, for it reveals the concluding events in God's ultimate plan of redemption. The details of John's vision are complex and confusing, and a thorough knowledge of the rest of God's revelation (the Bible) is helpful in understanding the unfolding of the plan. John addresses his writing to "the seven churches that are in Asia." Those geographical sites in Asia Minor were in what is now Turkey, real places in real-time.

Second Reading:

Note: Verses 15 – 16, omitted from the reading, are included below.

> *Revelation 1:9-19 NAS95 9 I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, 11 saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." 12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. 14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 19 "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.*

John is in exile "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (verse 1). The other apostles

have all been killed, but John remains to hear this final revelation of Jesus. He hears a voice instructing him to write what he is about to see and hear in a book and send it all to seven existing churches where the Gospel has been preached and received. What he sees in his vision is overwhelming. First, he sees someone "like a son of man" in the middle of seven lampstands. The description of the man clearly pictures the Lord Jesus, perhaps in a glorified, majestic state. "Son of man" is the title Jesus most often refers to himself. Each of the descriptions of this man is of interest and undoubtedly reflects something of His divine nature and activity. Of special interest is the reference to "a sharp two-edged sword" out of His mouth. It reminds us of the statement in Hebrews 4:12, "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword . . . discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The reference is not just to the written Word of God, the Bible, but any word from God.

John's reaction was similar to Isaiah's in Isaiah 6 when he saw the Lord "high and lifted up" and Job when he finally encountered God in person (chapters 40 & 41). God's presence causes one to fall upon his face in an abject sense of his unworthiness and recognition of the worthiness of God.

The response of the "Man" to John in verse 19 is insightful. It likely provides a key to understanding the relation he is about to record. He is to write about three topics: 1) what he "has seen," no doubt the revelation of the Son of God; 2) "the things which are," referring to the character and the action of the seven churches to which he is to send the letters (chapters 2 & 3), and 3) "the things which will take place after these things." Chapter 4 begins the revelation of what is yet to come in God's completed plan.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Chapter 20 of John's Gospel is a highlight. It begins with discovering the empty tomb, confirming the miraculous resurrection of the Lord Jesus! It includes several appearances of Jesus to His disciples and some significant statements to be considered. John concludes the chapter by telling us that Jesus performed many other signs. He has chosen only certain ones to bring his readers to faith in Him.

Gospel Reading:

> *John 20:19-31 NAS95 19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." 30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this Book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*

The first event in today's reading must have been a shock to the disciples who were meeting privately, probably in secret, in a closed room. It was the same day of the resurrection, and Peter and John had already observed the empty tomb. Mary had had a personal encounter with the risen Jesus, initially thinking he was the gardener. Apparently, the disciples were confused, not understanding Jesus' earlier teachings about these events. All of a sudden, Jesus appears in their midst. He acknowledges their fear and encourages them, saying, "Peace be with you." The following words in this first of several significant statements in this encounter are surprising: "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." They will likely not fully understand this instruction until they have further teaching before His return to heaven and the events of the Day of Pentecost. Then, they disperse over the world to preach the Gospel.

Another noteworthy word from Jesus bestowed the promised Holy Spirit on them. From this point on, they would carry the message of the Gospel with the clear offer of the forgiveness of sins to all who will hear them and respond to the truth in faith, acknowledging Jesus as Lord.

We're all familiar with the doubts expressed by the disciple Thomas. Like many of us, "seeing is believing" to Thomas. He was absent on this occasion, and when others told him about what had

happened, he simply could not believe it. A week later, Thomas is given the opportunity he thought he needed to believe; the proof stands before him. Immediately, he recognizes the truth; his doubts depart, and he worships, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus then offers another critical statement: "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." How blessed we are today to know of the work of Jesus to be our sacrifice for sin and give us the faith to believe when we have not seen with our eyes, but realizing instead that "believing is seeing."

Finally, John says that Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples that John does not write about. He chose only seven great signs that prove Jesus' claim to be the Son of God, and he recorded them "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you may have life in His name."

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways does John's message in Revelation resonate with you during your own trials and tribulations (revelation 1:9)? How does reading his revelation of the Lord help you through these things?

Challenge: Have you read the Book of Revelation? This Book promises a blessing to those who read it (Revelation 1:3). We urge you to read through this vital Scripture, taking into account the Old Testament references noted in your Bible.

2. In what ways does Thomas' experience give you hope as one who may have never seen the Lord Jesus? (We qualify this because of some of the events we have heard about in Islamic regions where the Lord has appeared in dreams and visions).

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 04-07-2024



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Since this Sunday marks the first week after the celebration of Easter, the readings for today focus upon the activities that occurred immediately after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Since the grave could not hold Jesus, if we have faith in Him we can trust that someday we too will rise from the dead with an incorruptible body.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. A lot had happened by the time we reach the end of chapter 4 where we pick up with today's reading. Jesus had already been taken up to heaven in a cloud (Acts 1:9). Afterwards, Peter addressed a gathering of about 120 believers (Acts 1:15) with the purpose of telling how Judas' betrayal of Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and then appointing Matthias as the traitor's replacement (Acts 1:26). The Day of Pentecost had come and the promised gift of the Person of the Holy Spirit had been sent (2:1-3). This event launched the full-scale ministry of the apostles to the Jews, which later extended to the Gentiles and the whole world. The church was growing at a frantic pace during this time. In fact, the number of believers began to expand exponentially, from just 11 to 3,000 in a very short time. "And the Lord was adding to their

number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47b). There was a special emphasis placed upon the ministries of preaching (prophecy), fellowship, communion, prayer and giving. In Chapter 3, we see the beginning of the powerful healing ministry of the disciples with the healing of a man that had been lame from birth (Acts 3:1-9). God used these events "evangelistically" as a powerful testimony of the supremacy of Jesus as well as to embolden and strengthen the believers in the growing church.

First Reading:

> *Acts 4:32-35 NAS95 32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.*

The Book of Acts is one of the various stages of transitions in the church. As the church grew, it was marked at this stage by unity, being "one heart and soul" (v. 32). The showed their unity by pooling their resources and sharing everything that they had (v. 32). This generosity came from their newfound relationship with Jesus Who gave everything for them (v. 33, "abundant grace was upon them all"). Can you imagine the attractive quality of a church where people are generous and the needs of the people are met by the sacrifices that each one would make? This type of church could probably be an inspiration for us today in how to live generously with our brothers and sisters in the Lord working towards unity.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we transition to the second reading, we find out from Saint John how to be unified in a doctrinal sense. At this point in church history, many people were claiming to be Christians but were not truly born of God. John wrote this letter to help people understand the characteristics of a true believer in Jesus.

Second Reading:

> *1 John 5:1-6 NAS95 1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world–our faith. 5 Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 6 This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.*

John said that "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ" is "born of God" (v. 1). Since this is the crux of knowing whether a person is a true believer, it's important for us to understand a couple of main points. First, what does it mean to believe that Jesus is the Christ? The word translated "Christ" is "Christos" in the original meaning "the anointed One" or "Messiah." Christos brings with it the concept of a Deliverer, the One that is coming to rescue people from their precarious position of sin. Isaiah spoke about the Messiah when he said, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners" (Isaiah 61:1). Jesus claimed to be the Messiah and declared that this prophecy was fulfilled through Him (Luke 4:18). In summary, to believe that Jesus is the Christ is to turn our hearts over to Him as God's special conduit of grace for deliverance from sin.

Second, what does it mean to be born of God? The concept of being "born of God" looks back to the conversation that Jesus had with Nicodemus at night recorded in the third chapter of John. In that discussion Jesus tells Nicodemus that in order to see the kingdom of God that he must be born again (John 3:3). We have been born physically, that is our first birth, and it is of the flesh. From the moment we were born we were alive physically but we are dead spiritually (Ephesians 2:1). It takes an act of God to regenerate our heart. Paul explained this further by saying, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Ephesians 2:4-5). To be born of God is to be born from above (or again) in a spiritual sense which provides us with eternal life.

Finally, putting these two concepts together gives us a litmus test for evaluating our hearts in relationship to God. Anyone can claim to be a Christian and to do Christian things like going to

church but not pass the test of true faith. Saint John helps us to see that true faith begins with trusting in Jesus for deliverance from our sin that results in our new spiritual birth.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from the Gospel of Saint John. The context is the evening of the day we call Easter Sunday. Mary Magdalene had just told the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Gospel Reading:

> *19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." 30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:19-31)*

The focus of the reading was Thomas' doubt and then his subsequent faith upon physically experiencing the resurrected Christ. Several points can be drawn from the text, First, notice that Jesus entered the room without knocking, without even opening the door; He just walked right through the wall! Talk about a grand entrance, and it's no wonder the disciples were scared. The

point is that Jesus had supernatural powers in His new, resurrected and glorified body. Second, although Jesus' resurrection body was different in it's capabilities, there was a one to one correspondence between Jesus' body that was crucified and laid in the grave and His resurrected body. Jesus will be forever recognizable by the scars given to Him during His earthly lifetime. Finally, Jesus was gentle with Thomas even though he expressed doubt among circumstances that we may consider compelling for him to believe. Since Jesus treated Thomas with such concern even though he doubted Him, we can be sure that Jesus walks with us through seasons of our own doubt.

Jesus bore the scars of His torture and crucifixion even after His resurrection. Although we don't know to what degree **we** will bear the scars of our own humiliation from men upon the earth, we can be certain that God will use our "scars" as an eternal testimony of our deliverance from the powers of darkness. We can rest assured that "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Reflection Questions

1. Jesus' appearance to the disciples in His resurrection body served as a foretaste of the type of body that all believers will receive one day when Jesus returns. Though we will never be God, we will become **like** Him. Saint John said, "We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2b).

How does being born of God (1 John 5:1) and the resurrection of Jesus (John 20) provide hope for you as you experience the limitations and struggles of a declining earthly body?

2. Every believer in Christ has seasons of doubt, but we can stand on God's Word to receive assurance. How does Saint John's description of true faith provide reassurance for you as you contemplate eternity? Would you change your answer in light of what John said in First John?

1 John 5:13 NAS95 13 *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.*

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Sunday Mass Notes for 04-24-2022



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a reading from the earliest history about the church, the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, relating their ministry in the very first weeks of the newly created Church after Pentecost and the Holy Spirit's descent upon those earliest believers. The second reading is from the very latest book of the New Testament, the Revelation of Jesus as given to the last of the apostles, John. John records the vision he received of the Lord Jesus, which serves both as a warning to the Church of Jesus Christ and as an introduction to the revelation of the final events in earthly history and into eternity. The Gospel reading, interestingly enough, is from the same author who recorded the Revelation. The chapter in this week's assignment includes the miraculous appearance of Jesus and significant teaching about faith and believing in Him.

Introduction to the First Reading:

By the fifth chapter of Acts the early Christians (and the number had grown to the thousands, Acts 2:41, 47) were demonstrating the love that Jesus said would be the mark of His disciples (John 13:34). They met together for worship, and they gave generously to the needs of others in the Christian family. Today's reading tells of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit working through His chosen people.

First Reading:

Acts 5:12-16 NAS95 12 At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. 13 But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. 14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, 15 to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. 16 Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.

"Signs and wonders" were miraculous events that not only brought healing to many, but, more importantly, served to authenticate the authority of the apostles, those who were sent by God to do His work and to lay a foundation for the establishing of His church on earth, the body of called-out believers (that's what the New Testament word for church means). The early Christians "were all with one accord" meeting near the Temple. Jesus had prayed (John 17) that His followers would be united, would be as one as He and the Father are. Nothing has hurt the image of the church so much as its disunity over the centuries of its history and even today.

Verse 13 is perplexing. Perhaps it suggests that non-believers did not associate with believers, though they highly respected them. Maybe they knew about the couple, earlier in chapter 5, who tried to deceive the apostles, claiming to give the gains from the sale of their property to the needy while keeping a part for themselves. They were stricken to death immediately, and the church learned the seriousness of deceitfulness and lying. That could explain why non-believers stayed away.

The remaining verses testify to the miraculous healing power of the apostles. Throughout the Book of Acts, these men of God gave testimony time and again that the power was not theirs, but was the work of the Jesus whom the religious leaders had rejected. Succeeding chapters will reveal the great

price true believers often had to pay to remain true to their faith. Yet, they counted it as nothing compared to what they had in Jesus and would ultimately enjoy with Him (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

John is the last of the apostles who had traveled with Jesus, witnessed His crucifixion, and fellowshipped with Him after His resurrection. In exile, John received a vision of the Lord Himself. What he writes is so important that Jesus told him, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it." That in itself is enough reason to study this book, for it reveals the concluding events in God's ultimate plan of redemption. The details of John's vision are complex and confusing, and a thorough knowledge of the rest of God's revelation (the Bible) is helpful in understanding the unfolding of the plan. John addresses his writing to "the seven churches that are in Asia." Those geographical sites in Asia Minor were in what is now Turkey, real places in real time.

Second Reading:

Note: Verses 15 – 16 which were omitted from the reading are included below.

Revelation 1:9-19 NAS95 9 I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, 11 saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." 12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. 14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 19 "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.

John is in exile "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus," verse 1. The other apostles have all been killed, but John remains to hear this final revelation of Jesus. He hears a voice that instructs him to write in a book what he is about to see and hear and send it all to seven existing churches where the Gospel has been preached and received. What he sees in his vision is overwhelming. First, he sees someone "like a son of man" in the middle of seven lampstands. The description of the man clearly pictures the Lord Jesus, perhaps in a glorified, majestic state. "Son of man," by the way, is the title that Jesus most often used to refer to himself. Each of the descriptions about this man is of interest and no doubt reflects something of His divine nature and activity. Of special interest is the reference to "a sharp two-edged sword" out of His mouth. It reminds us of the statement in Hebrews 4:12, "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword . . . discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The reference is not just to the written Word of God, the Bible, but any and every word from God.

John's reaction was similar to Isaiah's in Isaiah 6 when he saw the Lord "high and lifted up" and Job when he finally encountered God in person (chapters 40 & 41). God's presence causes one to fall upon his face in an abject sense of his own unworthiness and in recognition of the worthiness of God.

The response of the "Man" to John in verse 19 is insightful. It likely provides a key to the understanding of the relation he is about to record. He is to write about three topics: 1) what he "has seen," no doubt the revelation of the Son of God; 2) "the things which are," referring to the character and the action of the seven churches to which he is to send the letters (chapters 2 & 3), and 3) "the things which will take place after these things." Chapter 4 begins, then, the revelation of what is yet to come in God's completed plan.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Chapter 20 of John's Gospel is a highlight. It begins with the discovery of the empty tomb, confirming the miraculous resurrection of the Lord Jesus! It includes several appearances of Jesus to His disciples and some significant statements to be considered. And John concludes the chapter, telling us that there were many other signs that Jesus performed. He has chosen only certain ones to relate that are given to bring his readers to faith.

Gospel Reading:

John 20:19-31 NAS95 19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." 30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

The first event in today's reading must have been a shock to the disciples who were meeting privately, probably in secret, in a closed room. It's the same day of the resurrection, and Peter and John had already observed the empty tomb. Mary had actually had a personal encounter with the risen Jesus, at first thinking he was the gardener. Apparently, the disciples were confused, not having understood Jesus' teaching them in advance about these events. All of the sudden, Jesus appears in their midst. He knows of their fear and encourages them with "Peace be with you." The next words in this first of several significant statements in this encounter are surprising: "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." They will likely not fully understand this instruction until they have further teaching before His return to heaven and the events of the Day of Pentecost. Then they disperse over the world to preach the gospel.

Another noteworthy word from Jesus bestowed the promised Holy Spirit on them. From this point on, they would carry the message of the Gospel with the clear offer of the forgiveness of sins to all who will hear them and respond to the truth in faith, acknowledging Jesus as Lord.

We're all familiar with the doubts expressed by the disciple Thomas. Like many of us, "seeing is believing" to Thomas. He was not present on this occasion and when the others tell him about what happened, he simply cannot believe it. A week later, Thomas is given just the opportunity he thought

he needed to believe; the proof stands before him. Immediately, he recognizes the truth; his doubts depart, and he worships, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus then offers another important statement: "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." How blessed we are today to know of the work of Jesus to be our sacrifice for sin and give us the faith to believe when we have not seen with our eyes, but realizing instead that "believing is seeing."

Finally, note that John says that Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples that John does not write about. He chose only seven great signs which prove Jesus' claim to be the Son of God, and he recorded them "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you may have life in His name."

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways does John's message in Revelation resonate with you during your own trials and tribulations (revelation 1:9)? How does reading his revelation of the Lord help you through these things?

Challenge: Have you read the Book of Revelation? This Book promises a blessing to those who read it (Revelation 1:3). We urge you to read through this important Scripture, taking into account the Old Testament references that are noted in your Bible.

2. In what ways do Thomas' experience give you hope as one who may have never seen the Lord Jesus? (We qualify this because of some of the events we have heard about in Islamic regions where the Lord has appeared in dreams and visions).

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 04-11-2021

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Since this Sunday marks the first week after the celebration of Easter, the readings for today are focused upon the activities that occurred immediately after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Since the grave could not hold Jesus, if we have faith in Him we can trust that someday we too will rise from the dead with an incorruptible body.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. A lot had happened by the time we reach the end of chapter 4 where we pick up with today's reading. Jesus had already been taken up to heaven in a cloud (Acts 1:9). Afterwards, Peter addressed a gathering of about 120 believers (Acts 1:15) with the purpose of telling how Judas' betrayal of Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and then appointing Matthias as the traitor's replacement (Acts 1:26). The Day of Pentecost had come and the promised gift of the Person of the Holy Spirit had been sent (2:1-3). This event launched the full-scale ministry of the apostles to the Jews, which later extended to the Gentiles and the whole world. The church was growing at a frantic pace during this time. In fact, the number of believers began to expand exponentially, from just 11 to 3,000 in a very short time. "And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47b). There was a special emphasis placed upon the ministries of preaching (prophecy), fellowship, communion, prayer and giving. In Chapter 3, we see the beginning of the powerful healing ministry of the disciples with the healing of a man that had been lame from birth (Acts 3:1-9). God used these events evangelistically as a powerful testimony of the supremacy of Jesus as well as to embolden and strengthen the believers in the growing church.

First Reading:

Acts 4:32-35 NAS95 32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

The Book of Acts is one of various stages of transitions in the church. As the church grew, it was marked at this stage by unity, being "one heart and soul" (v. 32). The showed their unity by pooling their resources and sharing everything that they had (v.32). This generosity came from their newfound relationship with Jesus Who gave everything for them (v. 33, "abundant grace was upon them all"). Can you imagine the attractive quality of a church where people are generous and the needs of the people are met by the sacrifices that each one would make? This type of church could probably be an inspiration for us today in how to live generously with our brothers and sisters in the Lord working towards unity.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we transition to the second reading, we find out from Saint John how to be unified in a doctrinal sense. At this point in church history, many people were claiming to be Christians but were not truly born of God. John wrote this letter to help people understand the characteristics of a true believer in Jesus.

Second Reading:

1 John 5:1-6 NAS95 1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world–our faith. 5 Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 6 This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

John said that "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ" is "born of God" (v. 1). Since this is the crux of knowing whether a person is a true believer, it's important for us to understand a couple of main points. First, what does it mean to believe that Jesus is the Christ? The word translated "Christ" is "Christos" in the original meaning "the anointed One" or "Messiah." Christos brings with it the concept of a Deliverer, the One that is coming to rescue people from their precarious position of sin. Isaiah spoke about the Messiah when he said, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners" (Isaiah 61:1). Jesus claimed to be the Messiah and declared that this prophecy was fulfilled through Him (Luke 4:18). In summary, to believe that Jesus is the Christ is to turn our hearts over to Him as God's special conduit of grace for deliverance from sin.

Second, what does it mean to be born of God? The concept of being "born of God" harkens back to the conversation that Jesus had with Nicodemus at night recorded in the third chapter of John. In that discussion Jesus tells Nicodemus that in order to see the kingdom of God that he must be born again (John 3:3). We have been born physically, that is our first birth, and it is of the flesh. From the moment we were born we are alive physically but we are dead spiritually (Ephesians 2:1). It takes an act of God to regenerate our heart. Paul explained this further by saying, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Ephesians 2:4-5). To be born of God is to be born from above (or again) in a spiritual sense which provides us with eternal life.

Finally, putting these two concepts together gives us a litmus test for evaluating our hearts in relationship to God. Anyone can claim to be a Christian and to do Christian things like going to church but not pass the test of true faith. Saint John helps us to see that true faith begins with trusting in Jesus for deliverance from our sin that results in our new spiritual birth.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from the Gospel of Saint John. The context is the evening of the day we call Easter Sunday. Mary Magdalene had just told the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Gospel Reading:

19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." 30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:19-31)

The focus of the reading was Thomas' doubt and then his subsequent faith upon physically experiencing the resurrected Christ. Several points can be drawn from the text, First, notice that Jesus entered the room without knocking, without even opening the door; He just walked right through the wall! Talk about a grand entrance, and it's no wonder the disciples were scared. The point is that Jesus had supernatural powers in His new, resurrected and glorified body. Second, although Jesus' resurrection body was different in it's capabilities, there was a one to one correspondence between Jesus' body that was crucified and laid in the grave and His resurrected body. Jesus will be forever recognizable by the scars given to Him during His earthly lifetime. Finally, Jesus was gentle with Thomas even though he expressed doubt among circumstances that we may consider compelling for him to believe. Since Jesus treated Thomas with such concern even though he doubted Him, we can be sure that Jesus walks with us through seasons of our own doubt.

Jesus bore the scars of His torture and crucifixion even after His resurrection. Although we don't know to what degree **we** will bear the scars of our own humiliation from men upon the earth, we can be certain that God will use our "scars" as an eternal testimony of our deliverance from the powers of darkness. We can rest assured that "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

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Reflection Questions

1. Jesus' appearance to the disciples in His resurrection body served as a foretaste of the type of body that all believers will receive one day when Jesus returns. Though we will never be God, we will become **like** Him. Saint John said, "We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2b).

How does being born of God (1 John 5:1) and the resurrection of Jesus (John 20) provide hope for you as you experience the limitations and struggles of a declining earthly body?

2. Every believer in Christ has seasons of doubt, but we can stand on God's Word to receive assurance. How does Saint John's description of true faith provide reassurance for you as you contemplate eternity? Would you change your answer in light of what John said in First John?

1 John 5:13 NAS95 13 *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.*

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday 04-19-2020

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass. Since this Sunday marks the first week after the celebration of Easter, the readings for today are focused upon the activities that occurred immediately after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Since the grave could not hold Jesus, if we have faith in Him we can trust that someday we too will rise from the dead with an incorruptible body. This week we are beginning with the Gospel lesson in order to accentuate some of the themes that emerged from the Saint John's message. Then we will move onto the first reading from the Book of Acts and conclude with the second from First Peter, a study that will continue for the next several weeks.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from the Gospel of Saint John. The context is just the evening of the day we call Resurrection Sunday, or Easter. Mary Magdalene had just told the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Gospel Reading:

> *19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and *said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put*

> *my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." 30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:19-31)*

The focus of the reading was Thomas' doubt and then his subsequent faith upon physically experiencing the resurrected Christ. As we saw in the second reading, Jesus proclaimed a blessing upon those that have not seen but yet have believed "v. 27d-e." The key point of the passage though was stated in the last two verses. "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" vv. 30-31).

Several other points can be drawn from the text, First, notice that Jesus entered the room without knocking, without even opening the door; He just walked right through the wall! Talk about a grand entrance, and it's no wonder the disciples were scared. The point is that Jesus had supernatural powers in His new, resurrected and glorified body. Second, although Jesus' resurrection body was different in it's capabilities, there was a one to one correspondence between Jesus' body that was crucified and laid in the grave and His resurrected body. Jesus' appearance to the disciples in His resurrection body served as a foretaste of the body that all believers will receive one day when Jesus returns. Jesus will be forever recognizable by the scars given to Him during His earthly lifetime. Though we will never be God, we will become **like** Him. Saint John said, "We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2b). Third, since it was before the sending of the Holy Spirit the disciples were "in fear of the Jews" (v.19c). This contrasted greatly with what we read about the disciples and first believers in the first reading. Though we may fear those that persecute us, we, like the early Church, have the Holy Spirit of God living in us to give us boldness and hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). Finally, Jesus was gentle with Thomas even though he expressed doubt among circumstances that we may consider compelling for him to believe. Since Jesus treated Thomas with such concern even though he doubted Him, we can be sure that Jesus walks with us through seasons of our own doubt.

Jesus bore the scars of His torture and crucifixion even after His resurrection. Although we don't know to what degree **we** will bear the scars of our own humiliation from men upon the earth, we can

be certain that God will use our scars as an eternal testimony of our deliverance from the powers of darkness. We can rest assured that "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Chapter 2 of the Book of Acts. This Book was written by Luke, a physician and close companion of Saint Paul, sort of as a continuation of the Gospel by his name. Luke said in the opening chapter of Acts, "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen" (Acts 1:1-2). When Doctor Luke said, "the first account," he was referring to the Gospel of Luke that he addressed to a certain man named Theophilus. Luke's "orderly account" (Luke 1:3) presented in his Gospel record included exact details concerning the birth and life of Jesus and continued all the way to Jesus' ascension to heaven (Luke 24:51). The Book of Acts retraces just a bit back to the point where Jesus promised He would soon send the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The overall timeframe of the events recorded in Acts was from the beginning of the disciples' apostolic ministry to the world and concluding with Paul's arrest and subsequent journey to Rome for his trial.

A lot had happened by the time we reach the end of chapter 2 where we pick up with today's reading. Jesus had already been taken up to heaven in a cloud (Acts 1:9). Afterwards, Peter addressed a gathering of about 120 believers (Acts 1:15) with the purpose of telling how Judas' betrayal of Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and then appointing the traitor's replacement. Lots were cast and Matthias was chosen to hold the twelfth seat (v. 26). The Day of Pentecost had come and the promised gift of the person of the Holy Spirit had been sent (2:1-3). This event launched the full-scale ministry of the apostles to the Jews, which later extended to the Gentiles and the whole world. As you read the text try to imagine the whirlwind of events that had just happened.

First Reading:

> *42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)*

The Church at this point was largely communal, and marked by the lavish outworking of God through spiritual gifts and miracles. Though the disciples (except for John) had previously fled from Jesus during his arrest now they ministered with magnificent boldness and power through the Spirit of Jesus that lived inside of them (1 Peter 1:11). First, note that their worship continued in the temple, which was the former site of persecution by the same people that had put Jesus to death on the cross. Peter said that they "had favor with all the people" (v. 47a). Second, the number of believers began to expand exponentially, from just 11 to 3,000 in a very short time. "And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (v.47b). Third, the Church began the regular celebration of communion to remember Jesus (v. 46b). Each time we take communion we join into the same celebration held by this first group of Jesus' believers. Finally, there was a special emphasis placed upon the ministries of preaching (prophecy), fellowship, communion, prayer and giving. Peter said, "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (v. 42).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we transition to the second reading, review in your mind the ministries that marked the Early Church: Preaching, fellowship, communion, prayer, and giving. Can you see how the Church has incorporated all of these foundational elements into each worship service?

The second reading is from the Epistle of First Peter where Saint Peter addressed groups of believers that were dispersed throughout Asia Minor who were undergoing persecution and losing hope in the promises of Christ. Peter addressed the book to "those who [were] elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (First Peter 1:1). Peter told them, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you" (4:12). Peter told them that they were sharing in the sufferings of Jesus Christ so that when Jesus returned they may "rejoice with exultation" (v. 13).

At the time of this writing, many in the world are suffering for their testimony of Jesus Christ. In fact, many report that there is currently more persecution happening to Christians around the world than has existed at any time since Jesus began the Church. Saint Paul warned, "evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13). This reality was being lived out in the church at Asia Minor and is not much different from what is being experienced by Christians all around the world today. This reading marks the beginning of a study of 1 Peter that will continue for the next several weeks.

Second Reading:

> *3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:3-9)*

Peter said that God had caused believers to be "**born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (v. 3b, emphasis added). The word "again" in the original is a different word than what Jesus used in His discussion with Nicodemus in John 3:3 when He said, "You must be born again (or from above, depending upon your Bible version)." In John's Gospel Jesus' used a different word to create a word play providing a dual meaning of both "again" and "from above." Peter on the other hand used a word that specifically meant "again." Peter said in effect that a believer is born spiritually (a second type of birth) through God's great mercy to "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (v. 3b).

Why all the fuss about the meaning of a particular word? Peter's point was that through the evidence of a person's spiritual birth a person has hope through the reality of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. By this time (~ mid-60's AD), the Church had reached the point that many were not direct witnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter said, "though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls" (vv. 8-9). Peter said that although the people whom he addressed weren't eyewitnesses of Jesus, they still had the hope that Jesus' resurrection provided to all believers. Just because they experiencing persecution and weren't of the class of super apostles (see 2 Corinthians 11:5), they weren't inferior Christians (v. 6).

An important contrast exists between the Gospel lesson and the first reading from the Book of Acts. Did you notice that before the Holy Spirit was given that the disciples were fearful, then after the Holy Spirit came (Acts 2) they were ministering with a new sense of fervor? The presence of the Holy Spirit in one's life is what makes the difference between the cowering disciples and the bold disciples. Same people, different power source. Before, all they had was their will power – and as we know, it wasn't enough to keep them faithful to Jesus as He went to Calvary. However, now they had the presence of God's Spirit Himself living inside of them and giving them a new strength that went

beyond their own strength.

I experienced something similar in terms of this contrast through an event that happened to me some years ago. Before I had truly placed my faith in Jesus Christ, I was striving to be a good, moral person. I knew right from wrong and tried hard to live up to the biblical standards that I heard about in Sunday Mass each week. However, I found that I did not have the strength to say no to the world's ways, even when I knew it was wrong. I remember a turning point occurred when God gave me the power to say not in a certain situation when a friend was attempting to use me to participate in some shady dealings. While I technically wasn't doing anything wrong, he was – and wanted me to join in with him. Each time I had joined him in the past I had felt horrible about it, but I didn't have the power to tell him no. That was until I gave my life to Jesus Christ, and God's power came into my life through the Holy Spirit living inside of me. On a particular evening God orchestrated a series of events through which I finally found the power to tell my friend no.

How about you? Meditate for a moment about a time when you felt torn between choosing to do something for God versus something that the world called you to do. How did you deal with the tension? Regardless of what you chose, can you look back on this particular event in your life and see how God could have orchestrated these circumstances in order to reveal His glory to you?

Reflection Questions

1. Mother Teresa, when confronted with the suffering of millions of people in Calcutta expressed doubts during certain seasons of her life. Have you ever experienced a season of doubt during your Christian life? How did you deal with it? In light of what you studied in the Book of Acts, how can you tap into God's power source to deal with such events during the future?
2. We challenge you during the upcoming week to make a commitment to pray. Pray specifically that God would reveal to you one way in which you can testify to or pray for a person whom you sense is experiencing doubts in their faith. Write their name on a card and commit to pray for them at a certain time at least once this week. Second, if you are so bold, reach out to this person and let them know that you have been praying for them.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 04-28-2019



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a reading from the earliest history about the church, the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, relating their ministry in the very first weeks of the newly created Church after Pentecost and the Holy Spirit's descent upon those earliest believers. The second reading is from the very latest book of the New Testament, the Revelation of Jesus as given to the last of the apostles, John. John records the vision he received of the Lord Jesus, which serves both as a warning to the Church of Jesus Christ and as an introduction to the revelation of the final events in earthly history and into eternity. The Gospel reading, interestingly enough, is from the same author who recorded the Revelation. The chapter in this week's assignment includes the miraculous appearance of Jesus and significant teaching about faith and believing in Him.

Introduction to the First Reading:

By chapter 5, the early Christians (and the number had grown to the thousands, Acts 2:41, 47) were demonstrating the love that Jesus said would be the mark of His disciples (John 13:34). They met together for worship, and they gave generously to the needs of others in the Christian family. Today's portion tells of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit working through His chosen people.

First Reading:

> *Acts 5:12-16 NAS95 12 At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. 13 But none of the*

> *rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. 14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, 15 to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. 16 Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.*

"Signs and wonders" were miraculous events that not only brought healing to many but, more importantly, served to authenticate the authority of the apostles, those who were sent by God to do His work and to lay a foundation for the establishing of His church on earth, the body of called-out believers (that's what the New Testament word for church means). The early Christians "were all with one accord" meeting near the Temple. Jesus had prayed (John 17) that His followers would be united, would be as one as He and the Father are. Nothing has hurt the image of the church so much as its disunity over the centuries of its history and even today.

Verse 13 is perplexing. Perhaps it suggests that non-believers did not associate with believers, though they highly respected them. Maybe they knew about the couple, earlier in chapter 5, who tried to deceive the apostles, claiming to give the gains from the sale of their property to the needy while keeping a part for themselves. They were stricken to death immediately, and the church learned the seriousness of deceitfulness and lying. That could explain why non-believers stayed away.

The remaining verses testify to the miraculous healing power of the apostles. Throughout the Book of Acts, these men of God gave testimony time and again that the power was not theirs but was the work of the Jesus whom the religious leaders had rejected. Succeeding chapters will reveal the great price true believers often had to pay to remain true to their faith. Yet, they counted it as nothing compared to what they had in Jesus and would ultimately enjoy with Him (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

John is the last of the apostles who had traveled with Jesus, witnessed His crucifixion, and fellowshipped with Him after His resurrection. In exile, John received a vision of the Lord Himself. What he writes is so important that Jesus told him, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it." That in itself is enough reason to study this book, for it reveals the concluding events in God's ultimate plan of redemption. The details of John's vision are complex and confusing, and a thorough knowledge of the rest of God's revelation (the Bible) is helpful in understanding the unfolding of the plan. John addresses his writing to "the seven churches that are in Asia." Those geographical sites in Asia Minor were in what is now Turkey, real places in real time.

Second Reading:

Note: Verses 15 – 16 which were omitted from the reading are included below.

> *Revelation 1:9-19 NAS95 9 I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, 11 saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." 12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. 14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 19 "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.*

John is in exile "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus," verse 1. The other apostles have all been killed, but John remains to hear this final revelation of Jesus. He hears a voice that instructs him to write in a book what he is about to see and hear and send it all to seven existing churches where the Gospel has been preached and received. What he sees in his vision is overwhelming. First, he sees someone "like a son of man" in the middle of seven lampstands. The description of the man clearly pictures the Lord Jesus, perhaps in a glorified, majestic state. "Son of man," by the way, is the title that Jesus most often used to refer to himself. Each of the descriptions about this man is of interest and no doubt reflects something of His divine nature and activity. Of special interest is the reference to "a sharp two-edged sword" out of His mouth. It reminds us of the statement in Hebrews 4:12, "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword . . . discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The reference is not just to the written Word of God, the Bible, but any and every word from God.

John's reaction was similar to Isaiah's in Isaiah 6 when he saw the Lord "high and lifted up" and Job when he finally encountered God in person (chapters 40 & 41). God's presence causes one to fall upon his face in an abject sense of his own unworthiness and in recognition of the worthiness of God.

The response of the "Man" to John in verse 19 is insightful. It likely provides a key to the understanding of the relation he is about to record. He is to write about three topics: 1) what he "has seen," no doubt the revelation of the Son of God; 2) "the things which are," referring to the character and action of the seven churches to which he is to send the letters (chapters 2 & 3), and 3) "the things which will take place after these things." Chapter 4 begins, then, the revelation of what is yet to come in God's completed plan.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Chapter 20 of John's Gospel is a highlight. It begins with the discovery of the empty tomb, confirming the miraculous resurrection of the Lord Jesus! It includes several appearances of Jesus to His disciples and some significant statements to be considered. And John concludes the chapter, telling us that there were many other signs that Jesus performed. He has chosen only certain ones to relate that are given to bring his readers to faith.

Gospel Reading:

> *John 20:19-31 NAS95 19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." 30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*

The first event in today's reading must have been a shock to the disciples who were meeting

privately, probably in secret, in a closed room. It's the same day of the resurrection, and Peter and John had already observed the empty tomb. Mary had actually had a personal encounter with the risen Jesus, at first thinking he was the gardener. Apparently, the disciples were confused, not having understood Jesus' teaching them in advance about these events. All of the sudden, Jesus appears in their midst. He knows of their fear and encourages them with "Peace be with you." The next words in this first of several significant statements in this encounter are surprising: "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." They will likely not fully understand this instruction until they have further teaching before His return to heaven and the events of the Day of Pentecost. Then they disperse over the world to preach the gospel.

Another noteworthy word from Jesus bestowed the promised Holy Spirit on them. From this point on, they would carry the message of the Gospel with the clear offer of the forgiveness of sins to all who will hear them and respond to the truth in faith, acknowledging Jesus as Lord.

We're all familiar with the doubts expressed by the disciple Thomas. Like many of us "seeing is believing" to Thomas. He was not present on this occasion and when the others tell him about what happened, he simply cannot believe it. A week later, Thomas is given just the opportunity he thought he needed to believe; the proof stands before him. Immediately, he recognizes the truth; his doubts depart, and he worships, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus then offers another important statement: "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." How blessed we are today to know of the work of Jesus to be our sacrifice for sin and give us the faith to believe when we have not seen with our eyes, but realizing instead that "believing is seeing."

Finally, note that John says that Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples that John does not write about. He chose only seven great signs which prove Jesus' claim to be the Son of God, and he recorded them "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you may have life in His name."

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways does John's message in Revelation resonate with you during your own trials and tribulations (revelation 1:9)? How does reading his revelation of the Lord help you through these things?

Challenge: Have you read the Book of Revelation? This Book promises a blessing to those who read it (Revelation 1:3). We urge you to read through this important Scripture, taking into account the Old Testament references that are noted in your Bible.

2. In what ways does Thomas' experience give you hope as one who may have never seen the Lord Jesus? (We qualify this because of some of the events we have heard about in Islamic regions where the Lord has appeared in dreams and visions).

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 04-08-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Since this Sunday marks the first week after the celebration of Easter, the readings for today are focused upon the activities that occurred immediately after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Since the grave could not hold Jesus, if we have faith in Him we can trust that someday we too will rise from the dead with an incorruptible body.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. A lot had happened by the time we reach the end of chapter 4 where we pick up with today's reading. Jesus had already been taken up to heaven in a cloud (Acts 1:9). Afterwards, Peter addressed a gathering of about 120 believers (Acts 1:15) with the purpose of telling how Judas' betrayal of Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and then appointing Matthias as the traitor's replacement (Acts 1:26). The Day of Pentecost had come and the promised gift of the Person of the Holy Spirit had been sent (2:1-3). This event launched the full-scale ministry of the apostles to the Jews, which later extended to the Gentiles and the whole world.

The church was growing at a frantic pace during this time. In fact, the number of believers began to expand exponentially, from just 11 to 3,000 in a very short time. "And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47b). There was a special emphasis placed upon the ministries of preaching (prophecy), fellowship, communion, prayer and giving. In Chapter 3, we see the beginning of the powerful healing ministry of the disciples with the healing of a man that had been lame from birth (Acts 3:1-9). God used these events evangelistically as a powerful testimony of the supremacy of Jesus as well as to embolden and strengthen the believers in the growing church.

First Reading:

> *Acts 4:32-35 NAS95 32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.*

The Book of Acts is one of various stages of transitions in the church. As the church grew, it was marked at this stage by unity, being "one heart and soul" (v. 32). The showed their unity by pooling their resources and sharing everything that they had (v.32). This generosity came from their newfound relationship with Jesus Who gave everything for them (v. 33, "abundant grace was upon them all"). Can you imagine the attractive quality of a church where people are generous and the needs of the people are met by the sacrifices that each one would make? This type of church could probably be an inspiration for us today in how to live generously with our brothers and sisters in the Lord working towards unity.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we transition to the second reading, we find out from Saint John how to be unified in a doctrinal sense. At this point in church history, many people were claiming to be Christians but were not truly born of God. John wrote this letter to help people understand the characteristics of a true believer in Jesus.

Second Reading:

> *1 John 5:1-6 NAS95 1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world–our faith. 5 Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 6 This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water*

> *and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.*

John said that "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ" is "born of God" (v. 1). Since this is the crux of knowing whether a person is a true believer, it's important for us to understand a couple of main points. First, what does it mean to believe that Jesus is the Christ? The word translated "Christ" is "Christos" in the original meaning "the anointed One" or "Messiah." Christos brings with it the concept of a Deliverer, the One that is coming to rescue people from their precarious position of sin. Isaiah spoke about the Messiah when he said, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners" (Isaiah 61:1). Jesus claimed to be the Messiah and declared that this prophecy was fulfilled through Him (Luke 4:18). In summary, to believe that Jesus is the Christ is to turn our hearts over to Him as God's special conduit of grace for deliverance from sin.

Second, what does it mean to be born of God? The concept of being "born of God" harkens back to the conversation that Jesus had with Nicodemus at night recorded in the third chapter of John. In that discussion Jesus tells Nicodemus that in order to see the kingdom of God that he must be born again (John 3:3). We have been born physically, that is our first birth, and it is of the flesh. From the moment we were born we are alive physically but we are dead spiritually (Ephesians 2:1). It takes an act of God to regenerate our heart. Paul explained this further by saying, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Ephesians 2:4-5). To be born of God is to be born from above (or again) in a spiritual sense which provides us with eternal life.

Finally, putting these two concepts together gives us a litmus test for evaluating our hearts in relationship to God. Anyone can claim to be a Christian and to do Christian things like going to church but not pass the test of true faith. Saint John helps us to see that true faith begins with trusting in Jesus for deliverance from our sin that results in our new spiritual birth.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from the Gospel of Saint John. The context is the evening of the day we call Easter Sunday. Mary Magdalene had just told the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Gospel Reading:

> *19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained."*

> *24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." 30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:19-31)*

The focus of the reading was Thomas' doubt and then his subsequent faith upon physically experiencing the resurrected Christ. Several points can be drawn from the text, First, notice that Jesus entered the room without knocking, without even opening the door; He just walked right through the wall! Talk about a grand entrance, and it's no wonder the disciples were scared. The point is that Jesus had supernatural powers in His new, resurrected and glorified body. Second, although Jesus' resurrection body was different in it's capabilities, there was a one to one correspondence between Jesus' body that was crucified and laid in the grave and His resurrected body. Jesus will be forever recognizable by the scars given to Him during His earthly lifetime. Finally, Jesus was gentle with Thomas even though he expressed doubt among circumstances that we may consider compelling for him to believe. Since Jesus treated Thomas with such concern even though he doubted Him, we can be sure that Jesus walks with us through seasons of our own doubt.

Jesus bore the scars of His torture and crucifixion even after His resurrection. Although we don't know to what degree **we** will bear the scars of our own humiliation from men upon the earth, we can be certain that God will use our "scars" as an eternal testimony of our deliverance from the powers of darkness. We can rest assured that "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Reflection Questions

1. Jesus' appearance to the disciples in His resurrection body served as a foretaste of the type of body that all believers will receive one day when Jesus returns. Though we will never be God, we will become **like** Him. Saint John said, "We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2b).

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How does being born of God (1 John 5:1) and the resurrection of Jesus (John 20) provide hope for you as you experience the limitations and struggles of a declining earthly body?

2. Every believer in Christ has seasons of doubt, but we can stand on God's Word to receive assurance. How does Saint John's description of true faith provide reassurance for you as you contemplate eternity? Would you change your answer in light of what John said in First John?

> 1 John 5:13 NAS95 13 *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.*

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 4-23-2017



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass. Since this Sunday marks the first week after the celebration of Easter, the readings for today are focused upon the activities that occurred immediately after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Since the grave could not hold Jesus, if we have faith in Him we can trust that someday we too will rise from the dead with an incorruptible body. This week we are

beginning with the Gospel lesson in order to accentuate some of the themes that emerged from the Saint John's message. Then we will move onto the first reading from the Book of Acts and conclude with the second from First Peter, a study that will continue for the next several weeks.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from the Gospel of Saint John. The context is just the evening of the day we call Resurrection Sunday, or Easter. Mary Magdalene had just told the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Gospel Reading:

*19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and *said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." 30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:19-31)*

The focus of the reading was Thomas' doubt and then his subsequent faith upon physically experiencing the resurrected Christ. As we saw in the second reading, Jesus proclaimed a blessing upon those that have not seen but yet have believed "v. 27d-e." The key point of the passage though was stated in the last two verses. "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" vv. 30-31).

Several other points can be drawn from the text, First, notice that Jesus entered the room without knocking, without even opening the door; He just walked right through the wall! Talk about a grand entrance, and it's no wonder the disciples were scared. The point is that Jesus had supernatural

powers in His new, resurrected and glorified body. Second, although Jesus' resurrection body was different in it's capabilities, there was a one to one correspondence between Jesus' body that was crucified and laid in the grave and His resurrected body. Jesus' appearance to the disciples in His resurrection body served as a foretaste of the body that all believers will receive one day when Jesus returns. Jesus will be forever recognizable by the scars given to Him during His earthly lifetime. Though we will never be God, we will become **like** Him. Saint John said, "We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2b). Third, since it was before the sending of the Holy Spirit the disciples were "in fear of the Jews" (v.19c). This contrasted greatly with what we read about the disciples and first believers in the first reading. Though we may fear those that persecute us, we, like the early Church, have the Holy Spirit of God living in us to give us boldness and hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). Finally, Jesus was gentle with Thomas even though he expressed doubt among circumstances that we may consider compelling for him to believe. Since Jesus treated Thomas with such concern even though he doubted Him, we can be sure that Jesus walks with us through seasons of our own doubt.

Jesus bore the scars of His torture and crucifixion even after His resurrection. Although we don't know to what degree **we** will bear the scars of our own humiliation from men upon the earth, we can be certain that God will use our scars as an eternal testimony of our deliverance from the powers of darkness. We can rest assured that "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Chapter 2 of the Book of Acts. This Book was written by Luke, a physician and close companion of Saint Paul, sort of as a continuation of the Gospel by his name. Luke said in the opening chapter of Acts, "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen" (Acts 1:1-2). When Doctor Luke said, "the first account," he was referring to the Gospel of Luke that he addressed to a certain man named Theophilus. Luke's "orderly account" (Luke 1:3) presented in his Gospel record included exact details concerning the birth and life of Jesus and continued all the way to Jesus' ascension to heaven (Luke 24:51). The Book of Acts retraces just a bit back to the point where Jesus promised He would soon send the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The overall timeframe of the events recorded in Acts was from the beginning of the disciples' apostolic ministry to the world and concluding with Paul's arrest and subsequent journey to Rome for his trial.

A lot had happened by the time we reach the end of chapter 2 where we pick up with today's reading. Jesus had already been taken up to heaven in a cloud (Acts 1:9). Afterwards, Peter addressed a gathering of about 120 believers (Acts 1:15) with the purpose of telling how Judas' betrayal of Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and then appointing the traitor's replacement. Lots were cast and Matthias was chosen to hold the twelfth seat (v. 26). The Day of Pentecost had come and the promised gift of the person of the Holy Spirit had been sent (2:1-3). This

event launched the full-scale ministry of the apostles to the Jews, which later extended to the Gentiles and the whole world. As you read the text try to imagine the whirlwind of events that had just happened.

First Reading:

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

The Church at this point was largely communal, and marked by the lavish outworking of God through spiritual gifts and miracles. Though the disciples (except for John) had previously fled from Jesus during his arrest now they ministered with magnificent boldness and power through the Spirit of Jesus that lived inside of them (1 Peter 1:11). First, note that their worship continued in the temple, which was the former site of persecution by the same people that had put Jesus to death on the cross. Peter said that they "had favor with all the people" (v. 47a). Second, the number of believers began to expand exponentially, from just 11 to 3,000 in a very short time. "And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (v.47b). Third, the Church began the regular celebration of communion to remember Jesus (v. 46b). Each time we take communion we join into the same celebration held by this first group of Jesus' believers. Finally, there was a special emphasis placed upon the ministries of preaching (prophecy), fellowship, communion, prayer and giving. Peter said, "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (v. 42).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we transition to the second reading, review in your mind the ministries that marked the Early Church: Preaching, fellowship, communion, prayer, and giving. Can you see how the Church has incorporated all of these foundational elements into each worship service?

The second reading is from the Epistle of First Peter where Saint Peter addressed groups of believers that were dispersed throughout Asia Minor who were undergoing persecution and losing hope in the promises of Christ. Peter addressed the book to "those who [were] elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (First Peter 1:1). Peter told them, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you" (4:12). Peter told them that they were sharing in the sufferings of Jesus Christ so that when Jesus returned they may "rejoice with exultation" (v. 13).

At the time of this writing, many in the world are suffering for their testimony of Jesus Christ. In fact, many report that there is currently more persecution happening to Christians around the world than has existed at any time since Jesus began the Church. Saint Paul warned, "evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13). This reality was being lived out in the church at Asia Minor and is not much different from what is being experienced by Christians all around the world today. This reading marks the beginning of a study of 1 Peter that will continue for the next several weeks.

Second Reading:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:3-9)

Peter said that God had caused believers to be "**born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (v. 3b, emphasis added). The word "again" in the original is a different word than what Jesus used in His discussion with Nicodemus in John 3:3 when He said, "You must be born again (or from above, depending upon your Bible version)." In John's Gospel Jesus' used a different word to create a word play providing a dual meaning of both "again" and "from above." Peter on the other hand used a word that specifically meant "again." Peter said in effect that a believer is born spiritually (a second type of birth) through God's great mercy to "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (v. 3b).

Why all the fuss about the meaning of a particular word? Peter's point was that through the evidence of a person's spiritual birth a person has hope through the reality of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. By this time (~ mid-60's AD), the Church had reached the point that many were not direct witnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter said, "though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls" (vv. 8-9). Peter said that although the people whom he addressed weren't eyewitnesses of Jesus, they still had the hope that Jesus' resurrection provided to all believers. Just because they experiencing persecution and weren't of the class of super apostles (see 2 Corinthians 11:5), they weren't inferior Christians (v. 6).

An important contrast exists between the Gospel lesson and the first reading from the Book of Acts.

Did you notice that before the Holy Spirit was given that the disciples were fearful, then after the Holy Spirit came (Acts 2) they were ministering with a new sense of fervor? The presence of the Holy Spirit in one's life is what makes the difference between the cowering disciples and the bold disciples. Same people, different power source. Before, all they had was their will power – and as we know, it wasn't enough to keep them faithful to Jesus as He went to Calvary. However, now they had the presence of God's Spirit Himself living inside of them and giving them a new strength that went beyond their own strength.

I experienced something similar in terms of this contrast through an event that happened to me some years ago. Before I had placed my faith in Jesus Christ, I was striving to be a good, moral person. I knew right from wrong and tried hard to live up to the biblical standards that I heard about in Sunday Mass each week. However, I found that I did not have the strength to say no to the world's ways, even when I knew it was wrong. I remember a turning point occurred when God gave me the power to say not in a certain situation when a friend was attempting to use me to participate in some shady dealings. While I technically wasn't doing anything wrong, he was – and wanted me to join in with him. Each time I had joined him in the past I had felt horrible about it, but I didn't have the power to tell him no. That was until I gave my life to Jesus Christ, and God's power came into my life through the Holy Spirit living inside of me. On a particular evening God orchestrated a series of events through which I finally found the power to tell my friend no.

How about you? Meditate for a moment about a time when you felt torn between choosing to do something for God versus something that the world called you to do. How did you deal with the tension? Regardless of what you chose, can you look back on this particular event in your life and see how God could have orchestrated these circumstances in order to reveal His glory to you?

Reflection Questions

1. Mother Teresa, when confronted with the suffering of millions of people in Calcutta expressed doubts during certain seasons of her life. Have you ever experienced a season of doubt during your Christian life? How did you deal with it? In light of what you studied in the Book of Acts, how can you tap into God's power source to deal with such events during the future?

2. We challenge you during the upcoming week to make a commitment to pray. Pray specifically that God would reveal to you one way in which you can testify to or pray for a person whom you sense is experiencing doubts in their faith. Write their name on a card and commit to pray for them at a certain time at least once this week. Second, if you are so bold, reach out to this person and let them know that you have been praying for them.

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