2nd Sunday of Easter: Seeing the World through Easter Eyes

Focus/Theme: Seeing the world through the eyes of faith fundamentally changes our perspective
Function/Purpose: Motivate people to stronger life of faith that results in Christian witness and service.

Before I became a Deacon I spent 28 years on active duty in the USAF, and for six of those years I worked “inside the beltway” in the rarified air of Pentagon politics. During this time I learned a phrase that was originally coined in the late 1940’s. It went like this: “Where you stand depends on where you sit.” It describes how the worldview of people working in the federal government was heavily influenced by where in the bureaucracy they were working. Where they sat in the government bureaucracy determined how they saw the world and what stand they would take on the important policy issues of the day. We might chalk this up to “political Correctness,” or say they were just towing the party line, but economists and psychologists who have studied this behavior concluded that much deeper was happening; that people do adopt views about how the world works and what is fair and right based on the shared experiences of these close-nit communities, and they act in ways that express these values even in their personal lives.

This observation, I believe, challenges us to ask a very important question, does our shared experience as members of this close-nit Christian community alter our world views and our sense of what is fair and right, and does it compel us to act in our personal lives in ways that reflect these values. If we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the risen Son of God, and that through His sacrifice we have been
given eternal life in his name, then shouldn’t we be compelled to show our sense of peace, joy and love to all those around us, and bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus before the whole world, as the Apostles did so many years ago.

So let’s listen again to these stories we just heard and see how they challenge us. We heard on Good Friday how all the disciples ran away and denied Jesus out of fear; how their hope that Jesus was the Messiah had been utterly crushed, destroyed by His being crucified. And as the sun sets on the first Easter Sunday we find them still without hope, hiding in fear behind locked doors.

Seeing an empty tomb and hearing women talk about the resurrection was not enough. The world was too scary and threatening, and they were paralyzed by their doubt and fear. So Jesus comes to them and meets them where they are to give them the faith and courage they will need to be His disciples. And notice how Jesus greats them when he appears in the upper room -- not scolding and chiding them for their lack of faith, but He greats the way Jews always greet other Jews: Shalom Aleichem! “Peace be with you.” He is offering mercy and forgiveness and peace to them to reassure them and strengthen them. By showing them His hands and side He also offers them eternal hope, and proves that He is not only Lord and God, but also the man from Nazareth who had been their friend and teacher for three years. The one who died on the cross was now bodily resurrected to new life. Something radically new was happening which contains the promise of new,
eternal life for all who believe in it. And finally Jesus breaths the Holy Spirit into them so they can understand what is happening and take courage to act on it.

What wonderful and fantastic gifts Jesus has given his Apostles. But notice that Jesus changed nothing about the society or the world the apostles faced; the danger to their lives from the Jewish and Roman authorities and the crowds in Jerusalem was still very real. Rather he instructed them to go out into this unfriendly world and help Him transform it by spreading the good news to all nations and people.

The Apostles had a choice to make. I suppose they could have stayed in the upper room holding hands and singing Kumbaya and feeling very good about themselves and sharing their experiences of peace and mercy and joy given them by the risen Lord only with other believers, locked in the upper room where it was safe. Hmm, sharing our faith only with a close nit group of disciples on a Sunday morning. Sound familiar?

But that was not the nature of the faith or ministry that Christ gives his Apostles, or us. By experiencing the risen Christ and being strengthen by the Holy Spirit, Jesus’ Apostles are expected to see the world differently. And that is exactly what happens. The danger had not gone away; but the Apostles now had the courage of their faith to face it head-on. They were ready to live as true Disciples of Christ. As we hear in the first two reading, the first Apostles
fearlessly spread the good news and lived God’s commandments as Jesus had taught them, rejoicing “with an indescribable and glorious joy” as the letter of Peter tells us, and give their very lives to spread the faith.

Think about it. This motley crew once huddled in the upper, once paralyzed by doubt and fear, united an entire community of believers, changed the entire course of world history, founded a Christianity which now claims over 2 billion believers, and all but one of them would become martyrs for their faith – all because they sat in the upper room and had a personal encounter with the resurrected Christ.

And this should give us confidence and courage to overcome any doubts about our faith as well. Maybe we haven’t seen Jesus exactly the way the Apostles did that first Easter, but through the sacraments the living Jesus is still present among us and through the sacraments we receive the same spirit Christ breathed into the apostles, and the Risen Christ is with us here at the mass, in the Word of God and the table of the Eucharist.

These personal encounters with Christ given us through the sacraments today are just as real as what the Apostles experienced in the upper room centuries ago. And the gifts we receive through them are every bit as effective in helping us meet the demands of Christian discipleship today as they were on that first Easter Sunday. During this Easter season the Church around the world is being renewed
as its members are born anew by baptism, strengthen by confirmation and receiving the food of eternal life at their first Eucharist. MSGR Irwin told us on Holy Thursday that our Church has more people joining the Church this Easter season that we have seen in many decades. Just during the past few months here at St. John’s, we have had 4 infant baptisms, we had 2 new Christians welcomed into full communion with the Church at the Easter Vigil, a total of 15 young people who will soon be celebrating their first Eucharist and 11 of our teenagers will be confirmed this next Tuesday evening.

We have received so many gifts; I believe today we are all being challenged to share our story of the Joy we find in the Gospel with an unbelieving society that desperately needs to hear it! But like the Apostles, we have to make a choice. Being Christian can’t be something we do just for an hour on Sunday. The joy of the Gospel has to become an integral part of our daily life, just as it was for the early church.

“Where you stand depends on where you sit.” We sit here in this Catholic Church today, and we must show it out there in the world by living our lives in ways that overflow with the joy, peace, mercy, and freedom Christ has given us. Why? To paraphrase what Jesus told Thomas on that first Easter Sunday, we are those blessed ones who even though we have not seen Jesus in person the way the apostles did on that first Easter, yet we still believe He is Risen, Alleluia!