

Friday (2nd Vatican Council - "The Church")

So it is that this messianic people, though it does not include all people and may more than once look like a small flock, is nonetheless a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race.

Established by Christ as a fellowship of life, charity and truth, it is also used by him as an instrument of redemption for all, and is sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

Scripture (1 Peter 2:9)

You are a chosen race, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, a people to be a personal possession to sing the praises of God who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

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2nd Week of Easter

The Lord be with you. Everywhere

I hope I'm not alone in being able to sympathise with Thomas' initial reaction to the apostles' "Guess who dropped in while you were out" story, (John 20:19-31). When he left the disciples were afraid, ('for fear of the Jews'), dejected – it is still only Sunday evening – and no doubt confused, or perhaps irritated, by Mary Magdala's report that they had seen and spoken to Jesus, (Which, in Luke, they reject as nonsense). When he returns, he walks into a transformed room with his friends insisting that Jesus had been with them. Clearly a ridiculous story, and he quite reasonably says he will need to see and touch the wounds.

It would be harsh to criticise Thomas at this point, (this was what Jesus offered as evidence when he came into the room), but the issue is how long do I sympathise with him for? His stance continues for eight days, meaning that he was more 'point blank refusing to budge Thomas' than 'doubting Thomas'. During those days, he must surely have noticed the transformation in the other disciples. The most important difference was that Jesus had breathed on the disciples saying, 'Receive the Holy Spirit', at which point they were filled with the power of the risen Jesus. Thomas' mind could not make the leap to the risen Jesus, which the others had experienced in receiving the Spirit. It is this need to believe witnesses that is the point of the passage. Believers must no longer look for Jesus as they had known him, but come to know him in his resurrected, transformed state, present everywhere. This is the commission given to the disciples – to go out and spread the news of this new phase to all people, beginning with those who had previously rejected him as Son of God. (In John's Gospel, the sin which he is concerned with throughout is the sin of unbelief, so Jesus is saying that those who had previously rejected him hadn't 'missed the boat' by rejecting him before.)

In Acts 5:12-16, the number of people who are able to believe is growing. The apostles were performing many signs and wonders, pointing to a power beyond their own, (the reason why they are referred to as 'signs'). This power was why 'no one dared to join them', but clearly they overcame this fear.

It's no coincidence that this detail, together with the crowds flocking to the apostles is a clear reminder of the first stages of Jesus' ministry in Galilee. The apostles – and other believers – were not simply copying Jesus; Jesus was alive and working in them.

In case I'm tempted to dismiss this as only possible because they lived in a golden age, this passage in Acts comes after Peter and John had been taken before the Sanhedrin and immediately before their arrest. The bitter persecution is already beginning. Despite this, the community continue to be open to the Spirit and to radically alter their lives: because they believed without seeing, they were blessed.

This puts a huge responsibility on those of us who profess the resurrection of Jesus: if people are not attracted to our belief then either they are Thomas, or we are, since belief must, if genuine and not simply words recited, lead to transformation. It was the witness of people who were filled with the Holy Spirit, including transformed and joyful lives, which attracted people to recognise the presence of the risen Jesus.

The key question, I suppose, is 'would I be more committed if Jesus appeared in person?' If I cannot answer 'no, I already have him', then I'd better keep quiet during the Creed. Martin Bennett

Monday (Fr. Michael Ivens, SJ)

We are concerned with paschal joy, the joy proper to Easter, the joy which springs from a still more fundamental grace, that of a faith and love that make the risen Christ, though invisible, the very core of the believer's existence. The prime object of the paschal joy, then, is the here-and-now reality of the risen Christ. It consists in the transforming experience of a joy which is a union in that of the risen Christ himself. Flowing from Christ, this joy always moves a person to God's service, a source of strength, energy and courage to participate in the work of the kingdom. In its fullness, paschal joy engages the whole person, penetrates everyday experience, but its authenticity must be measured in terms of strength and depth rather than emotional exhilaration.

Scripture (Acts 2:38,41-43,46-47)

Peter said to the crowd, 'You must repent, and everyone of you must be baptised on the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the Holy Spirit. They accepted what he said and were baptised. That very day about three thousand were added to their number. They remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. And everyone was filled with awe; the apostles worked many signs and miracles. Each day, with one heart, they regularly went to the Temple but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God and were looked up to by everyone. Day by day, the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved

Tuesday (Cardinal Newman)

To know God and Christ, in scripture language, seems to mean to live under the conviction of his presence who is, to our bodily eyes, unseen. It is, in fact, to have faith, but not faith as the heathen might have, but gospel faith. The gospel is a *manifestation*, and therefore addressed to the eyes of our mind. Faith is the same principle as before, but with the opportunity of acting through a more certain and satisfactory sense.

Scripture (John 20:24-29)

Thomas was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said, 'We have seen the Lord,' but he answered, 'Unless I can see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe. Eight days later, the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you,' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving anymore but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.'

Wednesday (C.S.Lewis)

The society into which the Christian is called at baptism is not a collective, but a Body. We are summoned at the outset to combine as creatures with our Creator, as mortals with immortal, as redeemed sinners with sinless Redeemer. His presence, the interaction between him and us, must always be the overwhelmingly dominant factor in the life we are to lead within the Body, and any conception of Christian fellowship which does not primarily mean fellowship with him is out of court. The sacrifice of selfish privacy which is daily demanded of us is daily repaid a hundredfold in the true growth of personality which the life of the Body encourages.

Scripture (Ephesians 1:18-20,22-23)

May he enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see what hope his call holds for you, how rich is the glory of the heritage he offers among his holy people, and how extraordinarily great is the power he has exercised for us believers; this accords with the strength of his power at work in Christ, the power he exercised in raising him from the dead, and made him, as he is above all things, the head of the Church, which is his body, the glory of him who is filled, all in all.

Thursday (Oscar Romero)

Christ arisen has put in history's womb the beginning of a new world. To come to Mass on Sunday is to immerse oneself in that beginning, which again becomes present and is celebrated on the altar at Mass. And we who go forth from Mass know we have proclaimed the death that saved the world and proclaimed the resurrection of Christ, who lives as hope. I can imagine someone saying, "So now he thinks he is a prophet!" No, it's not that I think I'm a prophet, it's that you and I are a prophetic people. Everyone baptised has received a share in Christ's prophetic mission.

Scripture (Matthew 28: 16-20)

Meanwhile, the eleven set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. When they saw him, they fell down before him, though some hesitated. Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'