**2nd Sunday of Easter** **Year A**

**Not seeing, yet believing**

**First reading** Ex 14:10-end, 15: 20-21

*The Lord saves Israel from the Egyptians. Israel sees the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. The people believe in the Lord and in his servant, Moses.*

**Second reading** Acts 2:14a, 22-32

*In his first documented sermon, the apostle Peter preaches about the death and resurrection of Jesus.*

**Gospel** John 20:19-31

*John tells how the risen Jesus invests the disciples with the Spirit and later challenges the apostle Thomas to believe. Thomas professes his faith in Jesus as Lord and God.*

**HOMILY**

**Seeing Jesus**

Jesus’ first disciples had the rare privilege of knowing Jesus while he walked the roads of Palestine. They saw what Jesus did; they heard what Jesus said; they touched Jesus and they were touched by Jesus. Travelling around with Jesus, they saw Jesus at work: preaching, healing, forgiving, challenging, praying, eating, moving on, struggling, suffering and dying. During his public ministry, Jesus was gradually revealing himself through what he actually did. Sometimes we imagine that everything must have been clear to the disciples, but the Gospels tell us that many of Jesus’ words and deeds puzzled and confused them. The *meaning* of much of what Jesus did and said was not available to the disciples at the time; they had to wait for something else.

During his public ministry, the disciples could not see for themselves the whole truth about Jesus: they came to that truth only after the resurrection when they received from Jesus the Spirit of truth. As Jesus says to the disciples in St John’s Gospel: “The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you” (14:26). It is only when the disciples receive the Spirit of truth that they can fully answer the question, “Who do you say that I am?”

**Not seeing, yet believing**

When the disciples received the Spirit of truth, that new experience opened up the significance of their past with Jesus: they could now *remember with understanding* the wonderful words and deeds of Jesus. They became the first witnesses who could testify from their experience to the truth about Jesus. As long as the early Christian community had the first followers of Jesus in their midst, the community’s understanding of Jesus was rooted in those who had known Jesus personally. But what happens when there are no more witnesses who knew Jesus at first hand? Does the memory of Jesus fade away?

In Robert Browning’s poem *A Death in the Desert* the last of the apostles, John, is dying. John looks over his life and he wonders what will happen after the death of the last person to know Jesus personally. What will happen when…

 …*there is left on earth*

*No one alive who knew (consider this!)*

*– Saw with his eyes and handled with his hands*

*That which was from the first, the Word of Life.*

*How will it be when none more saith “I saw”?*

How can the Church speak about Jesus in a compelling way when no one can see him? This is precisely the problem that St John faces in today’s Gospel. The apostle Thomas is absent when Jesus appears to the others, and he cannot believe that Jesus is risen because he cannot see him. This is a story for everyone who was not present with the disciples on Easter evening – and that obviously includes ourselves. Today’s Gospel builds a bridge between those who saw Jesus and those who do not: “Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.” That is a blessing directed at us: we who believe in Jesus without seeing him.

**Our own faith**

We know from experience that it isn’t easy to believe in someone we cannot see for ourselves. But we also know that many people who did see Jesus did not believe in him. Seeing does not always lead to believing. The apostles have a unique place in the Church because they saw Jesus and believed in him, and they were commissioned to share their faith with others. Without the apostles’ seeing and believing there would be no Christian faith. That is why, as we affirm in the creed, one of the marks of the Church is that it is ‘apostolic’.

We have no experience of the physical presence of Jesus, but our understanding of him is linked through time – through all the previous generations of Christians – back to the apostles themselves. It is a great chain of faith which is linked to the person of Jesus himself.

We might think that the chain gets weaker the more it is distanced from the time of Jesus, but the Holy Spirit which Jesus gives is a *present reality* in the Church. The Holy Spirit is the life of the Church, the power which keeps the memory of Jesus alive, and which enables each of us to have a living relationship with God the Father.

The fact that we are worshipping now is a sign of our belief and a declaration of our love. Future generations depend on us to hand on what we have received so that they too can have life through the name of Jesus. If we all do that, there will never be an end to the story of Jesus.