

JESUS' EASTER GIFT: 2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER (A)

Readings: Acts 2:42-47; 1 Pet 1:3-9; Jn 20:19-31

Brian Gleeson CP

Easter means a great deal more than Easter bunnies, Easter eggs and Easter parades. As outward signs of joy and hope they have a place. But they only skim the surface of what Easter truly means, at least for Christians. The English poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, speaks of the meaning of Easter as being what must happen to us, because of what happened to Jesus. 'Let him easter in us,' the poet writes, 'be a dayspring [a dawn] to the dimness of us ...' The poet's message, expressed more simply, plainly, bluntly, is that the Risen Lord must rise in us - in our minds, attitudes, hearts and actions, - if Easter is to happen to us. So much so that Sister Joan Chittister suggests that our celebration of Easter puts before us a '*momentous question*': '*Will we ourselves,*' she asks, '*touched by Jesus now rise and do things differently?*' She spells out what this might mean:

... we must be prepared to be surprised by God in strange places, in ways we never thought we'd see and through the words of those we never thought we'd hear. ... It presumes that we will reach out to the other - to the ... immigrants and the blacks, to the strangers, the prisoners and the poor - in order to divine [discover] what visions to see with them, what cries to cry for them, what stones to move from the front of their graves.

The Word of God today spells out HOW Jesus both can and does easter in us. Particularly telling are these words of Jesus to his followers, words which go with his gift. They are the words: '*RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT.*' Recalling them today reminds us that the Risen Lord is with us now and until the end of time, in the form and person of the Holy Spirit.

This is an important aspect of our Easter Faith, one we declare every Sunday when we state in the Creed: '*I believe in the Holy Spirit.*' But if asked to explain what we mean, perhaps we would become tongue-tied. Part of our difficulty is that we cannot imagine or picture the Holy Spirit as easily as we can put a face on the Father and the Son. We all know fathers and mothers and their children, and this helps us to think of God as Father and Mother, and to think of Jesus as God's Son. But we simply cannot put a face on the Holy Spirit.

But the Holy Spirit is just as real, and some images may help us realize that. The Hebrew word for '*spirit*' means '*wind*' or '*breath*' and occurs 378 times in the Old Testament alone. So in sharing his own Spirit with them, Jesus first breathes on his gathered apostles. Earlier he has said that like the wind the Spirit of God '*blows where it wills*' (John 3:8). In fact, all his teaching on the Spirit suggests that like the wind the Spirit of God [Love] moves things along, warms them into life, drives them into action, and changes situations for the better. In a beautiful song Andrew Lloyd Webber puts it this way: '*Love, it changes everything.*'

We do not experience the Spirit of directly but in its effects on us. So much so that we can say that the Holy Spirit is the power of God and the love of God at work in our lives. To speak this way is to speak of grace. The grace that is the Holy Spirit gets things done in God's way - in us personally, in our Church, and in our world. All through the Acts of the Apostles (the New

Testament book we read throughout Easter), Luke highlights the Holy Spirit as the chief apostle, the divine apostle behind the human apostles. The Spirit keeps prompting them, guiding them, energizing them, restraining them, reassuring them, and comforting them. Again and again they sense the Spirit saying to them: '*Do this*', '*Do that*', '*Go here*', '*Go there*', etc., etc.

What a gift, what a wonderful gift! The very same Spirit of God who formed Jesus in the womb of Mary his mother, the very same Spirit of God who empowered him at Baptism to go about doing good and healing all sorts of wounded and troubled people, the very same Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead, has been shared with you and with me! So that yesterday, today and tomorrow we can be the presence of Jesus to all kinds of people!

This Easter gift of Jesus to his followers ought, then, fill us with that same peace and joy, that same exuberance and enthusiasm that led St Augustine to shout aloud: '*We are an Easter people and Alleluia [praise God] is our song!*' Imagine! Jesus Christ keeps coming to us in the power of the Holy Spirit, his other self. Simply amazing! Absolutely awesome!