

23rd April 2006 Easter Two B

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Readings:

- Acts 4:32-37
- Psalm 133 page 365
- 1John 1:1-2.2
- John 20:19-31

Text of readings is available at
<http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary/BEaster/bEaster2.htm>

I feel strangely nervous speaking to you for the last time before our trip away! But we will be back in January with new strength and freshness (I hope!).

Now, however, we continue to celebrate the risen Christ in this Easter season!

Each year at this time, reading from the book of Acts replace the Old Testament readings — The readings from Acts show the continued work of the Risen Christ in the Church and direct our minds to the **NEW** people of God rather than the OLD people of God in the Old Testament.

Today's passage from Acts features two aspects of the life of this new community of believers:

- the sharing of all things in common
and
- the apostle's preaching of the resurrection with great power.

This early expression of Christian community was not driven by some special economic doctrine but was a spontaneous expression of Christian agape (love) made necessary by the move from Galilee to Jerusalem. These country people found themselves thrust together in the big city and needed to support each other!

I believe that this indicates that the Risen Christ/The Holy Spirit calls us to respond to practical necessity — and this will of course vary from location to location and from one generation to the next.

It is a reminder to look around and find the most practical ways of supporting and encouraging one another every now and then to re-think how we express the presence of the Risen Christ among us.

YES! There is a need for community! But it will NOT be always as described here!

Paul expressed his concern for the Church community by organizing a collection from various churches for the needs of the Church in Jerusalem.

Some centuries later the Benedictine monastic tradition gave a different expression to this. They were different expressions of Church community.

But we still must look for this expression of community as a sign of our integrity as Christians. (My time away will give me some opportunity to look at Church Community... Taize and Iona and others...)

In the first letter of John, v7, he points to our unity with Christ as the source of our fellowship with each other.

"but if we walk in the light as he himself is the light,
we have fellowship with one another..."

And it is this "fellowship" that I think is exhibited by the disciples in the gospel after they had seen the Risen Christ.

Just look at the Gospel reading:

1. **First Day** — Sense of the New Creation of God.
2. Behind locked doors "for fear of the Jews".
3. Jesus stands among them — greeting: "Peace be with you"
the traditional greeting with God's peace
the wounded one says again: "Peace be with you"
4. He breathes the Spirit (breath of God) on them.
sending them with the message of forgiveness
but also with judgement on those things which oppose
the will of God.

But their first mission is to the doubting and faithless among their own and they go to Thomas.
It reminds me how difficult it is to minister to those who are close to us!

But they go to Thomas **NOT** with some nicely packaged program with coloured leaflets and a free bible **BUT telling their experience!**

"We have seen the Lord."

There is no substitute for telling OUR OWN STORY!
We know that Thomas the faithless and doubting, comes to believe.

...

Lately we have been praying for a young man (CJ) who, because of some issues in his life had a drug and alcohol problem.

A crisis earlier this year saw him admitted to a Salvation Army drug

and alcohol program and lo and behold after not hearing from him for many years he has written telling of a better life, restoration of relationships and a new found faith.

In the loving confrontation of that program, Christ is present.

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As we experience the life and fellowship of this Parish family of St Philip's I want to think again about how we perceive and understand the Risen Christ is present. And work out one sentence which tells how we have seen the Lord.

We have seen the Lord in the diversity of people...
we have seen the Lord in the way people deal with each other...
we will probably NOT say that we have seen the Lord:
in the clockwork precision of our liturgy
or the high level of organization of the parish

So, how have we seen the Lord?

But let us know that Christ is Risen and stands among us
to bring us God's Peace
to breathe his Spirit upon us
to send us out with forgiveness and judgement.

They were all filled with the Holy Ghost
Fill us, Holy Spirit.

When the doors are closed and we are afraid to move,
Fill us, Holy Spirit.

When we are hesitant and unable to speak,
Fill us, Holy Spirit.
When we lack energy and are unable to cope,
Fill us, Holy Spirit.

That we may go out in your power,
Fill us, Holy Spirit.

That we may live and work for you,
Fill us, Holy Spirit.

That we may be part of your mission,
Fill us, Holy Spirit.

Prayer from "The Rhythm of Life: Celtic Daily Prayer"
by David Adam p.67 Prayer for Wednesday evening.