

A Reflection for the 2nd Sunday of Easter 2020

I want to focus on aspects of the two scenes of today's Gospel, Jesus appearing to the apostles, who, we might say, are self-isolating in a Jerusalem room on the evening of the first Easter Sunday, and then his appearing to them again, but now with doubting Thomas present, in the same room the following Sunday. These episodes, we will see, remind us that with Jesus' Resurrection the present age disfigured by sin, sickness, cosmic upheavals and death has in a way ended and that the age to come has already begun.

Matthew had begun to make this point by associating with Calvary several events that the Old Testament had identified as signs of the arrival of the end of time: darkness at noon, the allusion to the coming of the prophet Elijah, and at the instant of Jesus' death, the tearing of the Temple veil, the earthquake and the raising of the saints from their graves.

This morning's Gospel continues this theme, first revealed in Jesus' threefold greeting to his apostles, "Peace be with you," which, by the way, fulfilled the promise that he had made in his farewell discourse at the Last Supper, "my peace I give you, my peace I leave to you." The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom* and its deepest Biblical meaning is the peace of the 'end-of-the-age,' when God's rebellious creation is healed and reconciled to him. It is the Risen Jesus who brings this reconciliation and peace and so reveals the dawn of the new creation, not of course without our free co-operation.

Our Gospel continues the theme of the life-to-come, already anticipated in time, with Jesus breathing on the apostles. This act symbolized his, and the Father's, gift of the Holy Spirit to the apostles empowering them to continue his ministry, and we especially see in today's Gospel the ministry of reconciling sinners to the Father. Fittingly this Sunday is also known as Divine Mercy Sunday.

Throughout John's Gospel there are echoes of the Book of Genesis. For instance it begins, as does Genesis, with the phrase, "In the beginning," and today's scene recalls Genesis' account of the creation of the first human being, "The Lord God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." In our Gospel the risen Jesus "breathed a breath of new life on his disciples, making them a new creation," for, as St Paul puts it, "in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

The risen Jesus gives us otherwise unattainable clarity concerning the meaning of our life and death, of time and human destiny. We might now say that human history is in "an orbit about the Incarnate Word, the Risen Lord," and that human history "cannot be forced out of its orbit."

With Jesus' resurrection the end time is already anticipated in history, but it is not fully present and there remains "a struggle for control" of space craft human history while it orbits around the risen Lord, thus "the course of history is erratic. Eventually, the risen Lord will return, come aboard the world, and take control of it." Then human history will have found its fulfillment, reaching its everlasting home in Christ with God the Father." For now we are to be at peace because it remains in orbit about him. In peace and hope, and in our good works marked by peace and hope, which are themselves his good gifts, we are saved.

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