

Second Sunday of Easter, April 16, 2023

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

First Reading — Acts 2:42-47

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

R. (1) Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting. or: R. Alleluia.

Let the house of Israel say, "His mercy endures forever." Let the house of Aaron say, "His mercy endures forever." Let those who fear the LORD say, "His mercy endures forever."

R. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting. or: R. Alleluia.

I was hard pressed and was falling, but the LORD helped me. My strength and my courage is the LORD, and he has been my savior. The joyful shout of victory in the tents of the just:

R. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting. or: R. Alleluia.

The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. By the LORD has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes. This is the day the LORD has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it.

R. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting. or: R. Alleluia.

Second Reading — 1 Peter 1:3-9

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, 7 so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him

you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. 9 As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls.

Gospel Reading — John 20:19-31

19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe." 26 Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God...

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

"To bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others" is the first goal of Go and Make Disciples.¹ Hopefully your enthusiasm for your faith in Christ is riding high after having focused on his passion, death and resurrection. Now you are faced with the ever-present option, do you keep the fire of Christ burning in your heart or do you let the embers grow cold and ashen like an abandoned fire? Because God is a gracious God, the option is yours. How can a person maintain enthusiasm for Christ, and the things of Christ? It seems that when we look at the first century Christians, who turned their world upside down with their enthusiasm, several things stand out. We see in the first reading that they were "devoted" to Jesus and to pleasing him. The word "devoted" means to give ourselves over to something, purposefully, and ardently. Lukewarmness wasn't an issue to these early believers because they knew they might be called on to die for their faith. Unlike Thomas, who would only believe when he could see and feel Jesus' wounds, early believers loved Jesus, having not physically seen him. Similarly, though they did not see, still they believed. Was it easier for them, than for us? No! It still took faith and commitment. And like the early Christians, when we reaffirm our love and faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit will respond to our receptivity, and like a breath from heaven that blows on the embers of our faith, he will reignite our enthusiasm. Sometimes, in good times, it seems easy to be a Christian, but what about the difficult times, the times of trials and testing of which the second reading speaks? The psalmist during his times of "falling" found that the "Lord helped me." Many of the early Christians experienced very difficult times, even times of persecution, and they found that the Lord's help and strength often came in the form of Christian community and companionship. Consequently, they availed themselves of the opportunities to be with others who were alive with faith. They were devoted to Jesus in the midst of community and communion. If we were to take a brilliantly glowing coal from a roaring, hot fire, and set it off by itself, in a very short period of time the formerly glowing embers would become ashen and cold. Similarly, when we withdraw ourselves from the warmth and glow of others who are alive in Christ, we will also grow cold in a similarly short period of time. God provides community for us through other believers, and we need this life-giving presence of Jesus' body to maintain our enthusiasm. And the rest of Christ's body needs us, for it is in relationship with other believers that both the Living Word and the written Word are more fully made known to one another. "But God has put this Word into the mouth of men in order that it may be communicated to other men. When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of man. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimers of the divine word of salvation."² Do you have such a companion? The option is yours! What will you do differently this year to keep the fires of your faith enthusiastically aflame?

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INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

First Reading —

1. How can a person who isn't in a religious vocation "devote" themselves to the teachings, communal life, breaking bread, and praying?

Second Reading —

2. Salvation is described as being "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading." Explain each of these terms in your own words.

Gospel Reading —

3. How do you feel when you hear someone express doubt regarding Christ? What do you think causes doubt and fear to arise in our lives?
4. What is Jesus' message for our fears and doubt?
5. What does the phrase "that you may come to believe" imply to you?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with a final prayer.