

The Lord's Day
2nd Sunday of Easter (B)
(Jn 20:19-31)

On Easter Sunday, the day of the Resurrection, Jesus appeared to the Apostles in the afternoon. Eight days later, again on Sunday, he appeared a second time to the Apostles as a group. John's Gospel illustrates how from the beginning, Jesus established the pattern which the Church has followed ever since.

Every Sunday is a commemoration of the Resurrection. Every Sunday, the disciples continue to gather, and the Risen Lord appears in their midst. For the Apostles the place was the "Upper Room" where the Last Supper took place (and later Pentecost). This "house church" became the first Catholic parish, and served the Christians of Jerusalem for many centuries. Since then many other churches have been established in all parts of the world, and in each of them, every Sunday, the Risen Lord comes among his disciples, not entering through the doors, but appearing mysteriously in the Sacred Liturgy.

In the 40 days following the Resurrection, the Risen Christ's appearances were visible "in the flesh." This was to establish a firm foundation of faith for the future Church, and complete the training of the apostles in their foundational role. After the Ascension, the Risen Christ's appearances would only be liturgical and sacramental, through from time to time the Risen Lord will appear to certain saints in special apparitions.¹

By his Resurrection appearances Jesus establishes not only the pattern of keeping holy the Lord's Day (Sunday) for worship, but also the pattern for what that Sunday worship looks like, which will be centered on the Last Supper "breaking of bread," i.e. the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

When Jesus first appears among the apostles, he immediately says to them, "*Peace be with you*" (Jn 20:19). Likewise in the Mass, as soon as we gather in his name, the priest echoes this greeting: "*The Lord be with you.*" But a bishop uses Christ's own words: "*Peace be with you.*" Mysteriously, Christ the Head is present to his people, the Body, through the minister (priest or bishop). We see and hear Christ through the liturgical minister. This is the power of the Sacrament of Ordination. Little children often see this presence of Jesus clearly in the priest. Likewise, Jesus speaks and is heard in the proclamation of the Gospel during Mass.

Immediately following his greeting, Jesus shows them the wounds in his hands and side, and speaks to them of the forgiveness of sins. The wounds are no longer ugly and painful, as they were when his body was taken down from the

¹ Such as St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (Sacred Heart visions), and St. Faustina Kowalska (Divine Mercy visions).

cross and buried in the tomb. In the Resurrection they are, as the Divine Mercy image depicts, radiant with glory and the grace of the Sacraments. By his wounds we are healed; by the Blood and Water flowing from his side we are washed clean, given life, and saved. This “showing” of the radiant wounds has been sung since time immemorial – since the very beginning – in the “Litany of Mercy” at the beginning of Mass (and at several other places, such as during the “Gloria” and “Agnus Dei.”): *“Lord, have mercy; Christ have mercy; Lord have mercy.”* Even today, we often sing the litany in the original Greek which was spoken by the early Church: *“Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.”*

Moreover, the Divine Mercy of the Resurrection is established by Jesus as its own Sacrament in the Church: *“He breathed on them saying, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit, whose sins you forgive are forgiven them...’”* (Jn 20:22-23) The Sacrament of Penance (“Confession”) is established for the reconciliation of sinners, and their worthy celebration of Sunday Mass. It leads people back to the mercy of God, who may have strayed from the Church and the commandments.

In the Resurrection appearances of the first 40 days, Jesus appears visibly in the flesh so that the Church may understand how really and truly present he is until the end: *“Know that I am with you always, to the end of the age”* (Mt 28:20). The Apostle Thomas plays a key role in this faith of the Church. He is not present at the first appearance (a reminder that we must never miss Sunday Mass: Jesus intends for us to understand it is in the context of the Liturgical assembly that he becomes present). As a result, he is skeptical. But all his doubt is overcome on the second Sunday when he is able to examine the wounds of Christ with his own hands.

Thomas is our “twin” (Jn 20:24). It is natural that we all share in this struggle of faith. Through his experience the words of the Lord apply to us: *“Thomas, you came to believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed”* (Jn 20:29). Like Thomas, Catholics repeat this great confession of faith when we behold the Risen Lord in the Eucharist. At the moment of consecration, we (silently) confess: *“My Lord and my God”* (Jn 20:28). It is in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which is Christ’s Real Presence, that our faith in the Resurrection culminates.

Sunday Mass, then, is sacred and absolute for a Catholic. We must not miss Mass if we want to see the Lord. Since the beginning and down to the present day, despite closed doors the Risen Lord Jesus continues to appear each Sunday in the Liturgy, in the midst of his disciples assembled in his name, to bring peace and mercy, and reveal himself as the one who was dead but now lives, and who gives them through the Eucharist a share in his own life.