

Easter 2.08

1. In this Easter season you would expect that our attention would be on the future, on the future life promised us by the Lord's resurrection. However, when we look at the readings, we see that we are looking back to the beginning of our church. The Gospel for today describes the risen Jesus' appearance to his first disciples huddled together in a closed room for fear of the Jews. Then in the first reading from Acts we have a description of the life of the early community in Jerusalem. Then in the second reading from the First Letter of Peter we have moved on to the second generation of believers who have not seen the risen Jesus: "Although you have never seen him," the letter says. But the author adds very beautifully: "Although you have not seen him, you love him."

2. When we look at the beginnings of things, our gaze is often clouded. You remember that phrase: Distance lends enchantment to the view. Sometimes, the farther away in time we are from an event, the more enchanted the remembered event becomes. All was beautiful then, we think to ourselves. We were young, and all was without care or worry. All was golden, all was just as it should be. But in our more rational moments we know that this is really not

the truth. Yes, there was a memorable time, a memorable moment, but everything was not perfect then. It never is.

3. That is true of the beginnings of our church too. The disciples report to Thomas that they have seen the risen Lord, but he won't believe them. Jesus has to repeat his appearance to bring this disciple around. So all was not perfect even at the time of the risen Jesus' appearance, that is, at the very beginning of our community. There was a doubter in their midst who needed more proof. But with this crooked line the author of this Gospel wrote a straight one: "You became a believer, Thomas, because you saw me. Blessed are those who have not seen but have believed." Here the author is talking about the people addressed in Peter's letter. They have not seen Jesus, yet they love him. And he is also talking about all believers down through the centuries who have not seen yet believe. We are among them.

4. The enchantment of the remembered moment is very much present in our First Reading from Acts. Here the early community's life is described in the most idyllic fashion: "Those who believed shared all things in common; they would see their property and goods, dividing everything on the basis of each one's need." Are we to take that literally? I don't think so. They still kept

their own homes. So they didn't share everything. But there must have been a sharing of their goods in a more than ordinary way. We can believe that. They took some meals together. You know that the Eucharist in the earliest days of the church was celebrated as part of a real meal. But even here there were problems, you remember. Paul criticizes the community at Corinth for not sharing their food at these common meals. However, despite such difficulties, these early Christian communities were attractive to people, and as a result they grew in numbers

5. It is good that we look back at our beginnings with enchanted eyes, because such enchantment tells us who we should be today. Even when the earliest community did not live up to its ideal self, it is good for us to see that they aimed high, and at moments reached the ideal. It is good for us to recall the ideal so that we can measure ourselves against it.

6. What then do we want to take from these readings today? There are a number of themes we could stress. What about reminding ourselves of who we are: we are the ones who, unlike Thomas, believe in the Lord Jesus even though we have not seen him. We are the ones who, like the people addressed in Peter's Letter, love him even though we have not seen him. Everything, everything, in

our faith depends on our love for Jesus, on our personal relationship with him. We Catholics are often more reticent in expressing our piety. We don't shake and wave our hands and call upon the name of Jesus out loud. Indeed, I am reminded of something which happened recently. Pastor Gene Giguere of The Harvest Community Church was so ecstatic at the success of the City Council Meeting discussing the situation of homeless men in our city that in the stairwell afterwards he and his community members wanted to stop and pray right there, and he invited us, the St. Charles' members present, to pray with them. I found myself embarrassed and heard myself respond to him by saying: "We Catholics don't pray in public, but we will certainly accompany your prayer." But for all our reticence we still know that our relationship with Jesus is the foundation of everything in our religious life, and I suspect that when we are dying, it will be his name that will be upon our lips. At least I hope that this will be so.

7. What about the community aspect of our faith. In large Catholic parishes there is great anonymity. You slip into church for Mass once a week and then go home, and that is it. No one knows you in the church, and you like it that way. When a parish is large, such anonymity is natural. But when a parish is smaller, it is easier to look a little more like the first community described in Acts this

morning. We can begin to get to know each other and we can begin to help each other in our daily lives. We can begin to become a community whose members share their lives in a more intimate way. That is our situation here at St. Charles. Unlike in the past, we are now a small community. That is a shame, most of us say. We look back to the days when St. Charles was large and well-heeled. But let us make lemonade with the lemons of our smallness. Let us grow as a community of believers who know each other and help each other. Who knows? If we do that, perhaps we will also grow in numbers. But whether we do or do not grow in numbers, we must be a community.