



HOMILY EASTER SUNDAY 02 B “Missionaries of Forgiveness and Healing”



Have you ever thought of yourself as a missionary?

In fact, you are a missionary. The Word of God today clearly asserts that you have a mission. Just like Jesus, you are sent to spread forgiveness and healing in the world.

Let's explore that mission together as it is presented in the gospel of John, chapter 20.

First, this is so new that John presents it as a NEW CREATION! The phrases “Evening of the first day” and “a week later” remind us of the original creation. John is asserting here that God is working, through Jesus, and us if we so choose, something even more powerful and exciting than the original creation!

Then there is TRANSFORMING HOPE: Jesus comes through closed doors to overcome their fear and timidity. This is good news for those we see as hopeless cases – schizophrenics, chronic obsessive compulsive disorders, suicide victims – all those who have hardened their hearts, or whose hearts life's hurts has hardened, against those who are trying to love them. In the end, Jesus can and will come through even those doors – so we are given hope. It is good news for the fearful – those who are terrified to face their fears, their past, their hurt, and instead run from them into addictions of all kinds.

What we are seeing here is a new power of forgiveness that can transform fear and hopelessness, into freedom and peace. There is in the risen Jesus who was betrayed, denied, mocked, scourged, beaten, ridiculed, called names, abused and finally crucified, not a trace of anger, resentment, hatred or desire for revenge – there is only peace that fills the disciples with joy. The peace and joy mentioned here are more than passing emotions – they are gifts of the Spirit, ways of being, elements of the kingdom of God, here being experienced by the disciples.

Then comes the MISSION. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Just a short phrase, yet a phrase that lifts our lives out of their mediocre rut to a new level of existence – we are sent to be like Jesus, to do what he did, to transform hatred and violence and darkness, into peace, joy and light. And we will do this as he did, through forgiveness and healing. We are sent to be agents, missionaries of forgiveness and healing.

How is this possible, you are probably asking? - Through the power of the HOLY SPIRIT. John is so excited and convinced of this new reality that he rolls the Resurrection of Jesus, his Appearances to the disciples, and the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost, into one boundary-breaking event on the same day – the first day of this new creation. The risen Jesus appears to the disciples, breathes on the disciples and gives them the Spirit of God, his Spirit, the Spirit of forgiveness, with the power to forgive, or retain, sins.

This is amazing! God who is all-powerful, gives us the power to bring about or restrain his new creation. When we forgive someone here on earth and are reconciled, that forgiveness and reconciliation takes place in heaven; a new creation happens here on earth, and God's kingdom is more deeply established here on earth, right here and right now!

The sad news is that when we, or others, refuse to forgive; when we, or others, refuse to apologize and receive forgiveness, then that is reflected in heaven; the new creation is held back, and the establishment of the kingdom of heaven here on earth is slowed down. Isn't that simply amazing? Do we realize the enormous importance of this mission we have to finally, fully, learn to forgive?

But that is not all. This new creation is not just about forgiveness – it is also about HEALING. The disbelief of Thomas helps us comprehend this part of the mystery. He refuses to believe until he sees the marks of the nails, puts his fingers in the nail holes and in the side of Jesus. So Jesus appears again just for Thomas (and for us) and once again shows him the scars, the wounds he still carries. This too is amazing, and important. Though Jesus has totally forgiven all the evil that was done to him, he still carries the scars from the wounds he received.

This reality teaches us about how forgiveness and healing go together. You have certainly heard the saying, usually said with repressed anger, "I'll forgive but I won't forget." That saying really means that I am not going to forgive. And we know that we never forget – we just try to forget, block out pain, medicate and repress it in all kinds of destructive ways.

It is different with Jesus. When we truly forgive the hurt, as he did, then we can remember, because the pain (the anger and resentment) leaves us, and our wounds then become sacred wounds. We can not only dare to remember, but also begin to talk about our past, our hurt, what happened to us, the way we were, because we have forgiven and there is no more pain. We can share our healing journey to encourage others.

Our memories now become reminders of how much we have forgiven or have been forgiven, how much we have loved or have been loved, rather than a source of a pain that we are driven to repress or medicate. We become examples of healing and agents of forgiveness. We are missionaries of forgiveness and healing.

There is an urgency and need around this message, because of the darkness and hatred and divisions in our families and communities and nations today. Just think of what is happening all the time, every day, in our lives, the lives of our families, our communities. Just a small simple example would be the names I heard parents call their kids during an Easter celebration in one village. My heart ached, as I realized that these parents thought it was normal and harmless to call their own kids names like "fat-ass!"

Clearly, it is time for something new, and that new thing is what Jesus came to invite us into. It is up to us – we can make a CHOICE. We can stay the way we are, stuck in our disbelief, anger and un-forgiveness, and restrain the kingdom of God, or we can choose to believe like Thomas, say “My Lord and My God” and enter into the mystery of becoming forgiveness and healing for the world.

We can start today. Perhaps a good confession is a good place to start, admitting my own sin and receiving forgiveness. Then of course I need to apologize to those I have hurt and receive their forgiveness.

Above all, I must set about trying to forgive, from the heart, all those who have hurt me and are still hurting me in any way, as a way of letting go of my anger and resentment. A way to do that is to communicate my feelings with love (no revenge or punishment) to those who have hurt me (Mt 18:15). Then I will truly be a missionary of forgiveness and healing, help bring about the kingdom of God, and experience the peace and joy that Jesus shared with his disciples when he appeared to them and gave them this missionary mandate that he now gives to us.

The 12 Step program is an amazingly simple and clear way to experience this mystery of forgiveness. Step 4 & 5 lead us to experience forgiveness from God, ourselves and one other person. Steps 8 & 9 lead us to experience forgiveness and hopefully reconciliation with all those we have hurt. And above all, Steps 6 & 7 lead us into a deep healing of our own anger and resentment as we learn to forgive those who hurt us.

Just recently a woman came to share her story with me. We looked at how she had been hurt in her life by others, the losses she suffered, the powerful, painful emotions she experienced, and the defects of character she developed such as false pride, stubbornness and rebelliousness to survive. She confessed the ways she had reacted to her hurt, trying to survive instead of forgive, and hurt others in the process.

When she understood that Jesus was within her, not preventing her pain but experiencing it with her (what others did to her they also did to Jesus), her faith suddenly became Good News. She saw how he had handled his pain through forgiveness, and resolved to do the same by writing letters to her abusers, sharing her pain with them, as a way of letting it go and forgiving them. She left, full of hope, relief, and even joy – to share the Good News of her forgiveness, healing and new life, with her sister. And that was an experience of Easter for me.

The Eucharist we celebrate is a commitment to be a missionary of forgiveness and healing. We repent, soak up God’s Word, and receive the very body and blood of Jesus that was broken and shed for us upon the cross in that over-whelming act of total forgiveness that heals us if we choose to believe and are open to that healing.

Let us today make that choice, believe with all our heart, surrender our lives and wills to this amazing God who is forgiveness, and become in our turn, agents, missionaries of forgiveness and healing.