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Joy in Believing

Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil., *Seton Hall University*



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Joy in Believing

**Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell
Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies
Seton Hall University
South Orange, NJ**

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Second Sunday of Easter

Sunday Readings for April 27, 2014 for Cycle A:

Acts 2:42-47; Ps 118; 1 Pt 1:3-9; Jn 20:19-31

JOY IN BELIEVING

Lawrence E. Frizzell

The octave of Easter completes the welcome of the Christian community to the newly baptized. In ancient times they laid aside their white garments and entered into the daily life of the Church to which they had committed themselves in faith.

When in the womb of the baptismal font the Holy Spirit begets to a new life those who believe in Christ, he gathers them into the one People of God which is a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people (1 Pt 2:9) (Vatican II, *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*).

All who have renewed their baptismal promises at Easter now express gratitude to God for the tremendous privileges of this sacrament. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." (1 Pt 1:3). All of the divine gifts we receive are bestowed upon us to foster life, defined as communion with the living God. This is the divine blessing for which St. Peter gives thanks-and-praise, an ascending movement of prayer that expresses appreciation for the gifts received and honor to the divine Giver.

The new life with God will bring consolations in abundance, but all the baptized must unite themselves with Jesus in his Passion, just as they ground their hope in his resurrection. Thus St. Peter warns of trials whereby faith will be purified and grow (1:7).

The example of the infant Church in Jerusalem provides principles for the Christian life in every age. "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the Apostles, and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42). Those commissioned by Christ are designated by the Greek term apostle. Their voice echoes the Master's teaching and applies it to the needs of each age, providing assurance that God's Word is understood properly. To be apostolic is an essential mark of Christ's Church today.

The Jewish custom of beginning each meal with a blessing (act of thanks-and-praise) and sharing from one loaf of bread taught people to recognize that everyone's life and nourishment come from God. As gifts, food items are the sustenance of a common life that is nurtured by edifying table conversation centered on God's Word. It seems that for early Christians "the breaking of bread" designated the Holy Eucharist, which would have been celebrated in the context of a meal. Other prayers would be patterned after the Jewish practice of linking the people's worship to the hours of sacrifice in the Temple. Psalms would have been a central element of the early Church's use of the Jewish Scriptures.

This life of prayer expressed a common faith in Jesus and developed into acts of charity by the common sharing of possessions. Although such complete generosity was soon modified, the rule of sharing with the poor, especially within the Church, remains a challenge to each generation.

At the Last Supper Jesus promised the gift of peace to his followers (Jn 14:27). The common greeting among Jews is the wish for peace (shalom, meaning health and well-being for all members of the community). As risen Lord, Jesus bestows this gift as the result of the new life and forgiveness flowing from the presence of the Holy Spirit in their midst.

The obtuse refusal of Thomas to accept the witness of his peers gives Jesus the occasion to manifest himself again. The mystery of his resurrection calls for faith that indeed this is the same person that the disciples knew, even though his mode of existence is endowed with new qualities. "My Lord and my God!" The confession of Thomas becomes our own expression of faith and the source of our happiness. "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed" (Jn 20:29).