

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER – YEAR A

The Sunday after Easter has been kept as the Feast of Divine Mercy by the Roman Catholic Church and some other churches since 2000 (a Jubilee Year). On this day we are called to reflect more personally on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the blessings we have received. The focus is on God's compassion, reminding us that the risen Lord offers us love that pardons, reconciles, and opens our own hearts to love.

First Reading Acts 2: 42–47

Between Easter and Pentecost Sundays, the First Reading is taken from the Acts of the Apostles. This book is a follow-on from Luke's Gospel; its date usually estimated as 80–85 AD. It gives an account of the beginnings of the early Christian Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and with the belief in the resurrection, and reflects the missionary zeal of this first generation of Christians. Between accounts of miracles, Luke gives us 'Summaries'. They are thumbnail sketches of the life of the early Christian church, and the text we are reading today is the first major 'Summary' in the book. It comes just after the conversion of 3000 people at Pentecost. For Luke, it is a way of taking stock, of describing the growth and character of the early communities. It gives a feeling of continuous narrative.

The communal sharing of all goods may have occurred only in the very early communities, because already in Chapter 5 (vv. 1–5), we are told of an incident when this was not the case.

The Temple, the main place of worship in the Old Testament, continues to be the focus in the Christian era; it is a place which could be used as a missionary forum, as indeed Jesus had used it (Luke 4:16–30). The early Christians also met in their houses to break bread. For us today this carries clear Eucharistic overtones, though at the time, they may simply have been sharing a meal together as a way of building fellowship. In Eastern culture, eating together cemented a community.

Gospel John 20: 19–31

The doors being locked ... for fear of the Jews

The disciples probably met in the upper room where they had eaten the Last Supper with Jesus. Knowing that the Jews would be hostile to them as followers of Jesus, they feared that they too would be arrested and put to death.



ST BEUNO'S OUTREACH
IN THE DIOCESE OF WREXHAM

'Peace be with you'

Jesus gives this normal Middle Eastern greeting both now and eight days later, as he shows his disciples the crucifixion wounds. This familiar greeting conveys more than peace; rather it means 'May God give you every good thing'.

'As the Father sent me, even so I am sending you'

With these words, Jesus commissioned the disciples to continue his ministry. As Jesus returns to his Father, he needs the Church to take his message to the people. The Church is the 'Body of Christ' (Ephesians 1: 23; 1 Cor. 12: 12). The Church in turn cannot function without Jesus, who is the power and the authority behind the message that it must take out into the world.

As Jesus went out in perfect love and obedience to his Father, so must his disciples, the Church, take God's message out in perfect love and obedience to God.

And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit'

The disciples receive the Holy Spirit at this appearance of the risen Jesus. St John's description of Jesus's actions is reminiscent of the story of creation, as God breathed life into the nostrils of the man he had formed (Genesis 2: 7), and of Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones when he hears God say 'Come ... O breath, and breathe upon these dead; let them live' (Ezekiel 37: 9).

'If you forgive, the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.'

Some scholars think that this may be a reference to the baptism of repentance which John the Baptist dispensed, a traditional sign of cleansing. Others think that these words outline the Church's duty to proclaim God's forgiveness to those who repent.

'Unless I see in his hands ... I will never believe.'

Thomas, who doubted Jesus's resurrection, is with the disciples when Jesus appears to them a second time. Jesus now offers Thomas the proof he needs to believe what the other disciples have told him.

'My Lord and my God!'

Thomas represents those who are totally honest in their doubt or disbelief. On seeing Jesus, we are not told if he actually touched Jesus's wounds, but only that he is now able to make his simple and uncompromising declaration of faith.

