NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Why haven't they gone?

Thomas Gumbleton | Apr. 15, 2010 The Peace Pulpit

A forgiving, a reconciling community

I think most of us are very quick to think of Thomas as the doubting one, and yet if we think about what happened as recorded in this gospel lesson, it's perhaps the other disciples who were more doubters than Thomas, because you can almost imagine Thomas saying to himself, "Look, they're telling me Jesus is alive, he's risen from the dead. They've known this for a whole week, yet here they are still in this room, hiding, afraid, and Jesus had said to them, 'As God sends me, I send you.' Why haven't they gone?" So maybe Thomas is the one who shows us the way of faith because immediately as he sees Jesus, he falls down, "You are my Lord and my God," and then it's after this that the disciples evidently begin to really hear what Jesus has said.

Second Sunday of Easter
Acts 5:12-16
Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24
Revelation 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19
John 20:19-31
Full text of the readings [1]

This is what we must do this morning. We must try to put ourselves in that situation of those first disciples. We are the community of disciples of Jesus today, gathered here in this church, and this is the living word of God, and Jesus really becomes present in our Eucharist. So this morning, Jesus is saying to us, "Peace be with you," and he gives us that gift of peace. We can absorb it, take it into our hearts, begin to feel that peacefulness that Jesus, and only Jesus, can give. But then as Jesus breathed on those first disciples, he breathes on us: "Receive the Holy Spirit," become alive, be aware that Jesus is alive within us. His spirit is given to us. Jesus is also saying to us, "As God has sent me, I send you."
We don't have to just sit and sort of continue to, well, kind of lull in the presence of Jesus and enjoy his peace; he's giving us a task: "As God has sent me, I send you."

The task that's given to us is explained in the first lesson today as those first disciples went out and began to heal, began to comfort people, began to share the message of Jesus. So must we wherever we are in our daily life. But I think most of all what we need to reflect on today is how Jesus wants us to be a forgiving, a reconciling community. Jesus says if you forgive, it can be over, sins are gone, but he also says, and sometimes we hear the translation, if you retain sin, it is retained. The word is really, if you "restrain" evil, that evil is restrained. If we really work to block evil, Jesus will help us to make that happen. I think both of these things are very important for us.

When you look at our church right now, it's a church that is being torn apart, isn't it? You can't be unaware of how the abuse scandal is just destroying our church, and it isn't over. Mostly it's not over because the forgiveness isn't there, that reconciliation that Jesus wanted among his disciples first of all, and a reconciliation that would go beyond them, beyond the community of disciples, to be a reconciliation that could change our world, make the reign of God break forth, if people really heard what Jesus said and began to forgive one another, be reconciled with one another. But there's a problem, isn't there, when the people who have perpetrated the sin, or the evil, won't acknowledge it. How can you forgive someone that never admits that he or she has done evil? That's what's happened in our church most of all right now.

I say this with great sadness, but I think it's true: Pope Benedict has not really accepted the responsibility that should be his responsibility and be accountable, or the bishops. So many will say, "Well, if something was done

badly, I'm sorry," but that's not good enough, is it, than to say, "If I did not do the right thing, and I did not if I allowed the priest to be moved from one place to another. Hold me accountable for that and I beg your forgiveness." Then the forgiveness could happen, the reconciliation could take place, and that's what we need within our church. It's a gift that Jesus gave on that first Easter Sunday night, and it's a gift he gives to us right now. Among ourselves, within our parish community, we must be quick to acknowledge if we're wrong, if we've done something wrong, but then we must also be even more quick to say, "Yes, I forgive," and be reconciled. It has to happen within our families, within our communities where we live, within this parish family. We must become that kind of a forgiving and reconciling church community so that that spirit of reconciliation will spread beyond us and into our world.

But the second thing that Jesus asks of us today when he says, not only forgive and be reconciled; restrain evil. To me, one of the most obvious evils in our world right now, and it's an evil that threatens the very existence of our planet, are those thousands and thousands of nuclear weapons that are deployed right now -- thousands of them on hair-trigger alert. Our world could be destroyed in a moment. Some of us who are here, I'm sure, remember Hiroshima, the first time such a weapon was used. In nine seconds, 100,000 people were killed -- innocent people. Hiroshima was not a military target, it was a city of people -- men, women and children -- and just obliterated. The heat was so intense that where there was a person, that person was vaporized -- disappeared -- a mark left on a piece of rubble. Those that were killed and the tens of thousands that were left with radiation sickness and the suffering went on for years and years, and then we did it again.

This past week, President Obama has taken a step in the right direction. He's calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons. That would be restraining evil. "We must restrain evil," Jesus says, and if we do, it can be restrained. There will be much controversy over this. Many people have said, "We can't do it. That's too dangerous. It will leave us vulnerable." But if we really listen to Jesus, we must do it if we're his disciples, if we really believe what he has told us and we accept the commission he's given to us to carry on his work: "As God has sent me, I send you."

This, of course, is something that has been talked about back in 1963. President John Kennedy made a first step toward what he hoped to be the beginning of steps to abolish the bomb way back then, when he pushed throw a treaty to stop all testing of weapons in space. That treaty was signed and then ratified just a couple of months before he was murdered. If he had not been murdered, he probably would have taken this further into disarmament. But we've gone on all of these years, building up more and more, keeping our world always on the verge if imminent and total destruction. In 1983, the Catholic bishops published a pastoral letter about peace and about nuclear weapons, and made it very clear that no one who followed Jesus and his teachings could ever be involved in the use of such weapons. They are an evil that can never, ever be justified, so we must restrain this evil.

The task that's been given to us today by Jesus is one that's perhaps very difficult and yet, if we listen carefully to what that disciple on Patmos says to us today, in the vision that he shares with us, "Seeing him, I fell at his feet like one dead, but he touched me with his right hand and said, 'Do not be afraid. It is I, the first and the last. I am the living one. I was dead, but now I live.'" That's the message that Jesus says to us today. He is alive in our midst and if we really believe this and accept this and come to know Jesus, and know that he's alive in our midst, we know that we can do his work. We can begin to be a community of reconciling people. We can be the community that restrains evil. We can do as Jesus says, "As God has sent me, I send you." We can enter into the work of Jesus to make the reign of God happen, which will be a reign of peace and love, forgiveness and joy. Commit ourselves to that this morning and God's peace will be experienced deeply within us, and we'll carry that peace wherever we go.

Source URL (retrieved on *03/11/2014 - 21:33*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/peace-pulpit/why-havent-they-gone

Links:

[1] http://www.usccb.org/nab/readings/041110.shtml