

In our Gospel this morning we listened to St. Luke's account of the things that happened on the evening of the first Easter Sunday, while the Apostles and some of the disciples were gathered in the Upper Room with windows barred and doors bolted. In Luke's story the room was haunted by absence, that of Jesus, as well as two of the Twelve, - and yet it was filled with many bitter-sweet memories.

It was here that the Master had washed their feet, and eased their anxiety, where he had compared himself to a vine, and them as the branches, where he had promised them the coming of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, and celebrated the Last Supper with them. But it was also **in this room** that they had sworn their loyalty to him, a loyalty that didn't even see the night through.

At that point the Apostles were very much a wounded group of people, - wounded individually, - by fear, doubt, grief and despair, - while as a group they were wounded because their unity had been broken: - two of their number were absent, - one was dead (Judas) and the other, (Thomas) was going through a crisis of faith, and, - like all people in pain, they had erected a barrier around themselves.

It was in that situation, Luke tells us, that Jesus, unexpectedly, appeared in their midst. They had just heard the two travellers to Emmaeus tell their story or how Jesus had joined them on the road, - they had in fact greeted those two with the news that the Lord had also appeared to Peter, but they were still far from convinced of all this had really happened.

Now Jesus had come to them, while they were still guilt-ridden and filled with doubts and fears (because of their cowardice and betrayal.)

In one bold move Jesus broke through that barrier, and stood among them. He didn't blame them or even scold them for failing him. There was no blame, no recrimination. He knew how they were feeling, so he didn't rub salt into their wounds. Instead he brought them something they desperately needed. He said to them: "Peace be with you." He said it not

once but twice, to make sure it sank in. In receiving his peace, they also received his forgiveness.

It was then that the greatness and wonder of what had happened struck them: death had been overcome, evil had been overcome, their sin and betrayal had been overcome. The Goodness and Truth that Jesus had shared with them for three wonderful years had triumphed, Love had triumphed, Life had triumphed. The humble Jesus had triumphed over all the evil forces that had been arrayed against him. And with that a fresh start was possible that filled them with joy.

Jesus' approach was so gentle. There was no harshness in him. The humble Jesus, who triumphed over death, gave courage to his crushed apostles, healed their wounds, renewed their hope, gave them life, and empowered them. From utter collapse and failure, something totally and utterly new arose. The result was that they not only believed in him, but also in themselves. What a joy to be fully known as weak and imperfect, and yet fully loved at the same time.

Easter does not take away our weakness or remove our fears. But it does introduce a new element into our lives. It gives meaning to our pain. It lights it up with hope. All is different because Jesus is alive and speaks his words of peace to us as he spoke them to the apostles. When we fail under trial and temptation we can draw encouragement from the story of Jesus' own disciples, all of whom failed during the passion.

Therefore, there is a quiet joy among us and a deep sense of peace, because we know that life is stronger than death.