

John 20:19-23

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews (Jewish Leaders), Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After He said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

The Gospel of Lord

Reflection Questions

The Context: Several chapters serve as the context for this reading. In chapter 14 Jesus reassures His disciples that He will never leave them orphaned or alone because He is sending the Holy Spirit to them. Then in verse 27 of Chapter 14 Jesus gives the disciples His Peace (not as the world gives) and tells them not to be afraid. A week later, Jesus will meet up with the disciples again, this time in the presence of Thomas and once again bequeath them His Peace.

- 1) The phrase, “It was evening on that day” refers to Easter evening, the same day that the disciples saw the empty tomb. John tells us that the disciples are hiding behind closed locked doors. The locked doors represent several things; 1) the disciples’ fear of the Jewish authorities (the Pharisees in particular) and 2) Jesus’ power that will not be restrained by a tomb or a locked door. What are some of our personal fears that keep us behind locked doors? How has Jesus broken through those “doors” and offered you His loving presence?
- 2) Do we find ourselves surprised by the disciples’ intense fear? The humanity of the disciples is recorded in all of the gospels. How does this public record of the disciple’s humanity and vulnerability as human beings encourage us on our path of discipleship especially in light of some of the courageous things that they ended up doing on behalf of the gospel (e.g. martyrdom)?
- 3) The first thing that Jesus says to them is “Peace be with you!” In almost all of the resurrection accounts, Jesus says this first. His Peace is one of the first things He “bequeaths” to us. What does that tell us about the value of this Peace related to the mission He has for us? The Peace that He offers is qualitatively different from the peace that the world gives (John 14:27). This is the Peace that passes all understanding and surpasses anything that the world may throw at it. How is this qualitatively different Peace essential to the Christian mission? What role does it play in the spiritual realm as well as the emotional realm?
- 4) “After He said this, He showed them His hands and His side.” (vs. 20) In this scene, Jesus has a body that can walk through doors and yet that body still bears the stigmatic wounds. When He shows them His wounds, His disciples rejoiced proving that the same person who was beaten and crucified is now

risen. How does Christ's victory over death directly relate to the victories that He is calling us to through the crosses we bear?

- 5) During the time when John's gospel was written, the Christian community was having difficulty with Gnostics who believed that physical matter was evil and if Jesus were to be considered the Son of God, He would have to have been pure spirit. This gospel account clearly describes that the One who bears the wounds (from the real physical body) is the same one who has risen victorious in a resurrected body. How might such a description be useful in evangelizing modern readers who may have the same problem with dualism?
- 6) For the gospel writer, John, the breath of the Spirit was the substance and sign of the commission. The word for 'breathed' here is the Greek: 'enephusesen' which means 'breathed *into* them' reminding us of God breathing the breath of life into the first human beings (Gen. 2:7). As God breathed life into Adam and Eve, so now Jesus breathes the new life of the Spirit *into* His disciples so that they will be spiritually empowered to carry out the mission. The people who were once huddling together in fear behind locked doors, now become people who can go out to the crowds and proclaim the Good News fearlessly. How have you been "commissioned" by the Spirit of God to do the ministry that you are now a part of? Have you had an experience of being particularly empowered by the Holy Spirit for a task that has been given to you?
- 7) "Just as the Father has sent me, so I send you." Imagine Jesus saying those words to you. What does He mean? How is this a real commissioning of the disciples and of us? What do you hear Him saying to you?
- 8) "Receive the Holy Spirit" How is our receptivity to the Holy Spirit directly related to our mission in Him?
- 9) (vs. 23) What is your experience of being released and releasing others through forgiveness? What is your experience of being held bondage or holding someone else bound in unforgiveness?