

# Lesson 8

## Second Sunday of Easter

### The Holy Gospel: John 20:19–31

The Jews did not name the days of the week, but identified them in their relation to the Sabbath Day. The Greek text here has “the first day with reference to the Sabbath,” which designated it as the first day after the Sabbath. Our English translation, “the first day of the week,” is appropriate—it was the evening of Easter Sunday when the events recorded here took place.

It is not hard to understand that the disciples would have the doors locked for fear of the Jews. If the authorities had been bold enough to see to the death of Jesus, it surely could have been that they, Jesus’ disciples, were in danger too. The sudden appearance of Jesus among them without knocking and entering through the door surely got their attention.

118. Jesus’ “Peace be with you” was the common Jewish greeting, *Shalom*. How did its use by the risen Jesus on this occasion add new meaning to it? Why did Jesus repeat this greeting as He spoke of their commissioning as His representatives?

119. How is Jesus’ commissioning of those who represent Him related to His having been sent by the Father?

120. What was the point of Jesus’ breathing on them as He gave them the Holy Spirit? In what sense was this gift of the Spirit preliminary to the later outpouring of the Spirit on them on the Day of Pentecost?

The authority to forgive sins or not forgive sins, which was given by Jesus to the apostles and then to the Church, is not to be used in an arbitrary manner, but only as a pointed, personal application of the Law-Gospel message we are commissioned to proclaim.

121. What do we call the authority Jesus gives to those who represent Him? How do we experience the use of this authority in our life as a congregation?

The Greek is more expressive than our “forgive” and “not forgive.” The Greek *aphete* means that sins are “sent away” from a person; the Greek *kratete* speaks of sins being “held fast” to a person (see Psalm 103:11–12).

122. What is the purpose of the Church’s pointedly telling those who persist in willful sin and refuse to repent that their sins are not forgiven?

Thomas was unwilling to base his faith on the experience of others, and Jesus accommodated His questioning disciple. But when His enemies had demanded a convincing miraculous sign, He had refused to comply with their demand.

123. Why was Jesus willing to go an additional step to give Thomas a firsthand Easter experience? Why must we, as modern Christians, be happy to hear that Thomas’s initial skepticism gave way to full conviction? Will Jesus always accommodate questioning and skepticism on the part of His followers?

124. What do you sense as you read the last verses of John 20? What was John’s purpose in writing his Gospel? In what way was the account of Jesus’ interaction with Thomas a good way to bring the purpose of his Gospel to a climax?

## **The First Lesson: Acts 4:32–35**

The Sundays of Easter use selections from the Book of Acts as First Lessons. This is fitting. The celebration of Jesus’ victorious completion of His saving work spotlights what it meant for the apostles, and what it means for us, that Jesus is alive, and that He is continuing to carry out His saving ministry through those whom He commissions to represent Him—the apostles in their day, and the Church in every time and place.

Acts 2 tells us that the first Christians “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (v. 42). That continued to be the hallmark of the Church as its numbers grew to 5,000 and beyond. Here Luke focused on their solution to the problem of the needy among them. Their selling possessions and bringing the money to the apostles for distribution was a spontaneous display of love.

125. What was the fountain from which their spontaneous acts of Christian love flowed? What continually refreshed their desire to serve Christ and His people in this way?

Later, this practice became the setting in which God showed the Church the importance of honesty and sincerity in the display of such love, and that He sees and judges motives as well as deeds, as when He exposed and severely judged the hypocrisy of two members who wanted to impress the congregation but lied to the Holy Spirit in the process.

126. How does this First Lesson tie in with the Holy Gospel for the day?

## **The Epistle for the Day: 1 John 1:1–2:2**

Though John the apostle did not identify himself as the writer of the Letter, the Early Church was unanimous in naming him as the author. This “Epistle of Love” evidently was intended to be a circular letter sent by John from Ephesus to be read in the Churches of the province of Asia. It was written toward the end of the first century to underscore John’s eyewitness testimony to the *incarnation* of Christ, the Son of God as Jesus our Savior—and thus to counteract the beginnings of Gnosticism in the Church, which questioned His truly becoming the God-man. It will instruct us as the Epistle for the Day on all of the Sundays of Easter.

The first paragraph of John’s First Letter reminds the reader of the prologue of his Gospel, which in turn played on the first statements of Genesis 1. John wrote about the Logos, the “Word of life.”

127. What was John insisting on with “which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands”? (See Colossians 2:9–10.)

John wrote of fellowship between Christians being based on fellowship with God through the Word made flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ. *Koinōnia*, “fellowship,” means “a sharing or participating in” or “the enjoyment of intimate personal intercourse.” John was hoping that his testimony would lead to a return to true Christian fellowship on the part of those who had separated themselves from the Christian body because of what they claimed as “higher knowledge” direct from the Spirit.

128. On what basis was this fellowship to be regained? (See John 14:6–7.)

129. What quality in God is emphasized by “God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all”? What did John point to as the first indicator that a Christian is “[walking] in the light”? (See Colossians 3:15–17.) What benefit is ours as we walk in the light?

130. On the other hand, what is meant by walking in the darkness? What results from this? What is the one thing God’s love cannot deal with? (See Luke 18:9–14.) What did all of this say to those who were being led astray by incipient Gnosticism?

John made Jesus’ saving work as God’s atoning sacrifice for our sins very clear. *Hilasmōs*, “propitiation,” was used in the Septuagint, the Old Testament in Greek, for the covering of the ark of the covenant between the cherubim, where the presence of God was thought to be most intensely located.

This was called God's "mercy seat." The blood of the sacrificial animal was sprinkled on this mercy seat on the annual Day of Atonement. John's words assure us that Jesus' blood shed on the cross became a once-for-all *hilasmos*, God's mercy seat, His atoning sacrifice (See Hebrews 9:11–14).

131. How does the assurance of God's forgiving love encourage us to not sin in our daily life? How can we live with the fact that none of us succeeds in "not sinning"? (See Hebrews 9:11–14.) How did John assure us of our Savior's ongoing concern and action for us?

132. Why is it vitally important to us that Jesus' atoning sacrifice was for "the sins of the whole world"? (See Romans 3:21–26.)