

A Sermon for the Second Sunday of Easter

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We come, today, to a Sunday in the Church year that has quite an interesting array of names. Let me begin with a caveat and say, the name is NOT ‘The Sunday After Easter.’ We may call it the Second Sunday OF Easter, or even Easter 2. But saying it is “after” Easter negates the amazing notion that Easter has not...never has...nor ever will to come “*be over.*” Can anyone tell me what some of the other names for this day might be? And remember, in God’s house, as long as it isn’t heresy it isn’t wrong!

Thomas the Apostle: We so often think of this as his day, because he figures so prominently in the Gospel reading. Actually, we celebrate St. Thomas on December 21.

Low Sunday: Indeed! There are multitudes of surmisings as to where this name originated. Suffice it to say that no one seems averse to accepting the name Low Sunday as the acknowledgment that attendance historically takes a real hit on this day in comparison with Easter.

Octave Sunday comes from the notion that, unlike in the everyday seven-day-a-week world, the church often functions in eight-day weeks, from Sunday to Sunday. Feasting used to take place for eight days straight, in this case beginning on Easter and continuing until Octave Sunday.

For many centuries, the newly baptized (who were most likely adults) were given a white gown at their baptism on Easter Sunday. They wore the gown throughout the week, changing into regular garments to be recognized as full members of Christ’s body, and for this reason we have the name *White or Alb Sunday*.

There is one more name...one I want to explore with you this morning...no matter how odd it sounds at the outset. Another name for this day – today, the eighth day after we rang the bells for Easter, no matter what color our clothing nor the count of our attendance – is Quasimodo Sunday. Yup! Quasimodo...

Those of you who have your Victor Hugo knowledge close at hand will remember that the Archdeacon of Notre Dame Cathedral found a baby abandoned on the doorstep. The year was 1467. The day was a Sunday...eight days following the celebration of Easter. In that long-ago time, the introit – the first section of the Mass – was a Gregorian chant sung in Latin. The opening words to that chant were (and still are, where they are used) *quasi modo geniti infantes* – in the manner of infants.

Now, the archdeacon would become the adoptive father of the child he found on what was already known as quasi- modo Sunday. And these are the lines Victor Hugo wrote, “He baptized his adopted child and called him Quasimodo; whether it was that he chose thereby to commemorate the day when he had found him, or that he meant to mark by that name how incomplete and imperfectly molded the poor little creature was. Indeed, Quasimodo, one-eyed, hunchbacked, and bow-legged, could hardly be considered as anything more than an *almost.*”

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In the child’s case, I suppose he was considered *almost human* because of his deformities – an assessment, praise be, that we hardly hold to in today’s world. Yet I could not let go of the notion that I, too, am incomplete and imperfectly molded...an

almost. Almost the person I would like to be, and always – always – *almost* the person I believe God would have me be. Why???

In this jubilant Easter season, we are invited to throw open every window in our hearts and minds and souls, and rejoice in the fresh breezes blowing through. Breezes of the Holy Spirit that bear the knowledge of God's love, always and everywhere freely given...the understanding of God's forgiveness, universal and eternal...the warmth of God's comfort, ever present and never ending. Why then do I feel *almost*? The only answer I can conceive is fear. I don't know about you, but I am afraid.

Rarely are we simply afraid we are not good enough...that's too easy...but oftentimes we're afraid to do the things – the hard things – we know we ought. And yes, this covers both “things done and things left undone.”

So often we are afraid of rejection – by both God and neighbor – and afraid of finding ourselves all alone. Afraid that when we find our step firmly planted on the wrong path, it will be too late to turn back. Afraid, in the dark night of the soul, that there is no God at all. We fear what we do not know, and what we cannot control. And fear overpowers us...and renders us incomplete and imperfectly molded...nothing more than an *almost*.

At the risk of sounding flippant – and believe me I am not – someone went to the trouble of counting the repetitive expressions in the Bible. Do you know which is most prevalent...the words that simply say, “Do not be afraid.” In fact, by some tallies, that phrase appears 365 times. That's one reminder, one encouragement, one reassurance – one invitation to move into wholeness – for every single day of the year. Hundreds of times in the Bible stories, someone (or a group of someones or even a nation of someones) knew fear...and God always responded, “Do not be afraid.”

I think the apostle Thomas was afraid. He may often be portrayed as a cynic...demanding proof of the Risen Lord...but maybe it was fear that he felt. Thomas had proved himself in his time with Jesus as a most loyal, devoted and loving follower. He urged the other disciples to accompany Jesus to Bethany, that they all might die with him, that Jesus might not die alone. In the telling of their last supper together, it was Thomas who worried that because he did not know where Jesus was going, he would not be able to follow. Thomas was not with the rest when they first encountered the Risen Savior and saw his wounds...maybe he was sincerely and desperately afraid that what the others told him was not the truth for which he longed so deeply. The minute his fears were laid aside, he knew he saw his Lord and God.

Overcoming fear requires a concerted effort on our part...just as it was required of Thomas...to open ourselves to trust. Trust that the darkness isn't full of danger. Trust that, even when life is incredibly harsh, God's love *is with us*. Trust that those times when we feel the most frustratingly “almost” God is acting in us and through us, teaching us, and using us. We grow in trust in times of silence, which Richard Rohr calls ‘the necessary space around things that allows them to develop and flourish without our pushing...because God will take it from there.’ And sometimes we grow in trust in the midst of the throng of jubilation and singing like the one we shared in the bright festival

light of Easter morn. Trust begets trust...and as we grow in our openness to trust in God we begin to let go of our fears. We grow a little farther from almost, and a little closer to whole. A little less the partial images we are and a little more into focus...as long as we trust, and allow the Light and Love of God, which longs to shine through us, access to the beautiful prism that *is* us.

What shall we do with this blessed and beautiful season of Easter? T would seem we have been given the Great Fifty Days to dance and sing and laugh and love...and grow in trust and cast out fear. It is time to *practice* loving...not as an act of perfecting something we could do better, but as an act of receiving the greatest love of all...filling up...overflowing...reflecting all that we receive as gift to shine on everyone and everything around us. This is the time when we should say with delight and without hesitation, “we are intimately loved by the One who creates *all* loving.” When God the creator says we are good, we would do well to let go of our own assessments - our petty carping and self-criticism - and accept God’s version of reality.

Why not take an Easter “vacation” from the fears and doubts and apprehensions that get in the way of opening to this overwhelming experience of God’s love for each and every one of us? Meister Eckhart said, “The love by which we love God is the very same love with which God has *first* loved us.” How then can we be inadequate? How then, in God’s eyes, can we be almost? When it comes to love, God is *always* the initiator, God is the doer, God is the one who seduces us. All we can do – all we are asked to do – is respond in kind.

As we move to the table to share the gifts of God, we take part in the Great Thanksgiving. Because every day is a day of resurrection, thanks be to God, this is not *just* a thanksgiving – and it is certainly not an *almost* thanksgiving. No, it is the Great Thanksgiving. And this morning Linda will say, “All thanks and praise are yours at *all* times and in *all* places, our *true* and *loving* God; through Jesus Christ, your eternal Word, who is the Wisdom from on high by whom you created all things. You laid the foundations of the world and enclosed the sea when it burst out from the depths; You brought forth all creatures of the earth and gave breath to humankind. *Wondrous are you, Holy One of Blessing, all you create is a sign of hope for our journey;*”

True and loving God...Jesus, who created us in Wisdom from on high...Giver of the breath of life to humankind...God, who is true and can be trusted, whose love casts out fear, who has taken us from darkness into light, from death into life, whose creation is the sign of hope for *our* journey...Maybe in this Easter season we can lay aside our fears and take up trust ...shed our doubts and bask – and grow confident – in the light of the God who gave us breath...silence our constant haranguing of ourselves and others and instead sing with joy in our hearts for the gifts we have been given.

Let us celebrate God’s love! Let us revel in God’s goodness! Fifty days of being more open to God than closed, more present to God than preoccupied with ourselves, more reaching out than pulling in. May these days help us to truly see ourselves as God sees us – never, ever *almost*...always, *always* whole. *Do not be afraid!*

Alleluia! Amen!!!