

Homily 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter Year B 2018  
 April 8, 2018

I wonder if you have seen a TV commercial that features an apple sitting in the middle of the screen. I don't remember the exact wording but the commentator says something like this: "some people call this "apple" a "banana." The point is then made that if you call an apple a banana enough times eventually some people will believe an apple is a banana. The point of the commercial is that if you repeat a lie enough times it can prove a powerful way of changing someone's reality. This commercial part of the "fake news" story so frequently heard about today. Despite the lie and despite the fact that many people will call an apple a banana the fact remains that an apple is an apple not a banana. Despite the fact that people are misled and believe the lie, the truth remains the truth. Apple really is an apple.

When I read the opening paragraph for our Gospel today I thought of this commercial. Let me reread the opening paragraph from John's Gospel for you now. The apple I am talking about this morning is inside this passage. See if you can pick out the apple, the topic of my sermon, before I tell you what it is.

*On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. 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." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.*

The apple I am talking about is the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The apostles are given the power to forgive sins or hold them bound right here in the bible passage I just read. Listen again to the passage. *"Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."*

Jesus gave the apostles the power to forgive sin. This is the truth of the bible passage. You can call this power to forgive sin whatever you want to call it, but, Catholics call it the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation. This is the apple I am talking about. It is absolutely clear in this passage that Christ is giving the apostles the power to forgive sin. There are other biblical references which support the fact that from the very earliest days of the Christian Church Reconciliation is a Sacrament. There are other historical documents from the earliest days of the church that support this fact, that is, Jesus gave the apostles the power to forgive sin or to hold it bound.

Some people deny this sacrament of forgiveness. They offer all kinds of explanations for what this passage might mean or what Christ could possibly have intended with his words. My point is that they are trying to call an apple a banana.

Eleven apostles survive the crucifixion, ten of them are behind locked doors on the first day of the week. Thomas is absent. Jesus appears in the room despite the locked doors. Jesus wishes the group peace twice. Then, Jesus does something with a powerful biblical history. Jesus breathes on them. This is not a test for mouthwash. The breathe of Jesus is the Holy Spirit. Recall that when God created man and woman in Genesis, God breathed on them the breathe of life and they became living beings. The passage in John's Gospel is the second breathing forth of the breathe of God, the second creation. Something is coming into being which did not exist before. It is the Christian priesthood.

This is an ordination. The breathe of God, the Holy Spirit comes forth upon these ten disciples. They are receiving a spiritual power to forgive sin in the name and power of Christ. They are the

first Christian priests. This power to forgive sin or hold sin bound is what we call today the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Penance.

At this point you are probably wondering why I am making such a big deal about this. I mean who cares if Jesus invested the apostles with the power to forgive sin? Not even Catholics go to confession anymore. This whole topic could not be more unimportant. Father, talk about something that has an impact on our lives not this Sacrament stuff.

It is true that Catholic Christians are not much interested in the Sacrament of Reconciliation anymore. The numbers of people who actually go to confession are almost negligible.

My purpose today is not to try to convince more people to go to confession. My purpose today is to say an apple is an apple. Is the truth important? Why is the truth important?

Reflect on this matter seriously. Jesus comes back from the dead. The first thing he does is give the apostles the power to take sin away or hold sin bound in the name of God.

Is Jesus the Son of God?

If you believe that Jesus is God, then do you believe that everything Jesus chose to do has significance? Do you believe that everything Jesus did was important? Jesus has made a decision here. The first thing Jesus does when he comes back from the dead is invest the apostles with the power to forgive sin.

There must be something of significance here!

If the very first thing Jesus does when he returns from the dead is give the apostles the power to forgive sins or hold them bound, if the very first thing Jesus does when he comes back from the dead concerns the Sacrament of Reconciliation, then would you agree that somehow, in some way Jesus thinks the Sacrament of Reconciliation is important?

Most Christian churches do not believe in the Sacrament of Penance, do not believe that the apostles today have the power to forgive sin in the name of Jesus. They are calling an apple a banana. They are denying the Sacrament Jesus instituted.

I think that if we truly believe Jesus is God than we should at least ask him why He thought this Sacrament of Reconciliation, which so many non Catholic churches call a banana, is a gift.

Why is the Sacrament of Penance such a gift to the life of the Christian Community? Look at what has just happened. The apostles were with Jesus day and night for three years. They were his friends. They were his brothers. They were his family. He trusted them. He believed they trusted him. Jesus believed they believed his words. And then comes the Passion and just about every one of these trusted brothers abandons him. Just about everyone acts as if Jesus had never spoken the truth about anything at all. This is like having a good marriage for 30 years and then one spouse decides to cheat on the other spouse. This is like letting your family down and committing a crime which destroys their lives. This is like marching in the January Pro-life Washington Crusade and then coming home and having an abortion. This is like a major catastrophic relationship failure.

What do the apostles need when Jesus returns from the dead? They need to know they are forgiven. There are times in life when God himself has to come down to earth, stand in front of you and speak forgiveness. Nothing else is sufficient to bring healing.

There may be times in your life when you will be responsible for a catastrophic moral failure. Jesus has set the stage so that when that time comes you will know where to find Him. Jesus will be waiting for you in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. God himself has come down to earth to speak forgiveness. Nothing else would be sufficient.