

**2 Easter– Year B – April 22, 2009 - Homily**  
**Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31**  
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The incredibly talented Don Henley, singer and songwriter -- most notably of the band The Eagles -- has been a key player in the music scene since the early seventies. He sums up the theme of our reading from the first letter of John rather nicely in his song *Heart of the Matter*. The lyrics most obviously describe a broken relationship, but can just as easily describe the world we live in, and why we are Christians. After all, isn't the fact of a broken relationship precisely why Christ died for us to mend, repair, fix -- however you want to describe the gift -- humanity's sad dislocation, and estrangement from God. Here's a sample of what Henley says in his song: "These times are so uncertain / There's a yearning undefined / And people filled with rage / We all need a little tenderness / How can love survive in such a graceless age? / .... All the things I thought I'd figured out / I have to learn again / I've been trying to get down / To the heart of the matter / But everything changes / And my friends seem to scatter / But I think its about forgiveness." What Henley might also have added is that it is also about community.

Let's look again at what John was saying to the early church after Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension. In what seems to be a reference to our friend doubting Thomas, John alludes to what all the disciples heard, saw, and touched concerning the "word of life". Why he does this is quickly revealed in his letter, "So that you may have fellowship with us." John clearly takes building up the Body of Christ very seriously indeed, and he is not willing to compromise on the message and meaning of our faith in Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

In a series of statements in the general format of "if X, then Y" that also get to the heart of the matter, John declares, proclaims, and testifies about what it means to be a part of the new Christian community, and how important it is to that community to welcome others into their fellowship. In fact, he calls it pure joy. The first point John makes is that there will likely be some who claim to be Christians, but are not. His proof, if you like, is by way of an example, and it is about being in community with one another, and especially about gathering together to be strengthened and cleansed from our sins by the sacrament of Holy Communion. You might have heard may say this before: there's no such thing as a individual Christian who is not part of a community of faith. It is actually an oxymoron to claim to be Christian and yet not enjoy the fellowship of community. The Body of Christ has many members, and noone can be isolated or out of communion with another and still truly be part of the Body. We need each other because God's love and the love we share in Christ, is all about relationship.

The second point John shares refutes another level of pridefulness and sinfulness concerning anyone who would claim to be Christian, but does not gather in community and fellowship. It is about those who say that they have no sin. John has no illusions, and neither should you or I. Yes, Jesus died so that all who confess His name, may receive forgiveness for their sins, but we are still human, and therefore quite capable of sinning. So anyone who claims to have no sin is actually claiming to have attained Christ-likeness in this life. Even though that is an admirable claim and one to which we are all working with God's help, there is only one Jesus, who has lived a sinless life. John's letter is a great warning to all the pretenders out there, along the lines of, "who do you think you're fooling. Not us. And not God. That's for sure!!" Given that we continue to sin, John explains that we also must continue to confess our sins to God through Jesus, our advocate, and so that we might receive forgiveness. Forgiveness is at the heart of God's grace, and is therefore at the heart of our own gratitude to God for all that God has done for us. It is a compelling motivation that fuels our own desire for transformation. It is what John calls being cleansed from all

unrighteousness. It is what others have called the path to holiness or Christ-likeness. The gift of the Holy Spirit that we have each received at Baptism works in us and through us to help us to keep moving closer to God, and further away from the sinful desires of our human hearts.

For the third “if X, then Y” statement, John is talking about those who say that they haven’t sinned. Anyone who believes that they have never sinned can have no need or use for a savior. However, as John points out, for one who is a follower of Christ to say that they have not sinned, is another situation that defies logic. To say so mocks the purpose of Jesus’ atoning death on a cross, and God’s vindication of Him in His resurrection for the life of the world. Jesus died for my sins, your sins, and the sins of the whole world. If we don’t believe that and confess it by sharing the Good News, then Jesus is really not our Savior because we would be saying that we don’t even need a savior. And furthermore, His truth cannot be in our hearts, because it is the conviction of our sinfulness and need for Jesus that brings us back to God.

Following the example of Paul, John writes in the hope and prayer that Jesus’ followers will not continue to sin wilfully, even though God has granted us His gift of grace. Paul says it like this: “What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?” (Romans 6:1-3) In what Henley calls a graceless age, he asks us, how can love survive? Is it just in the individual hearts of you and I, and other members of Christ’s Body throughout the world? Or is there even greater power when you and I share God’s grace in word and action, showing all the world that Jesus’ last commandment to the disciples is true: that we do, in fact, love one another.

And so we come back to the heart of the matter, for without the knowledge of the forgiveness of our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, we would truly be scattered and hopeless, just like so many in the world who are not yet part of our community and fellowship in Christ. The bonds of our common life in Christ involve the deepest and most meaningful elements of Life itself: love and forgiveness, fellowship and community, confessing our sins before God and the Church, and turning again to God in Christ as we continue the path to reconciliation. All these are part of our faith in action, and our ever-increasing joy in Christ. If we know and believe that the Lord has touched our hearts and minds, shown us the way of Life and light, and guided us by the still small voice of the Holy Spirit to new and unending life in Him – let’s share the Good News!

Amen.