Homily for 2nd Sunday of Easter (Year A)

Henry II, King of Germany and Holy Roman Emperor for ten years back in the eleventh century is not I guess someone most us have heard of. Why would we? He's been dead a long time. He is responsible though for what we will be doing after I finish this homily. It was his idea that at Sunday Mass we should recite the Creed. Henry II was a devout man, married to a devout woman and both of them were keen to say 'I believe.' So in the year 1014 they persuaded the pope at the time, Benedict VIII, to insert the Creed into the Mass since when we have been professing it every Sunday.

There's a story about Henry which says that not long after he got married and before he had become emperor he had a dream in which he was told to read the words that had appeared on his bedroom wall. 'After six' was what he read. Two words which changed his life. Henry supposed they meant he would die in six months. So he prepared by generous acts of charity. When he was still alive after six months he presumed it must have meant six years so he carried on with his generous acts of charity. And at the end of six years he was elected the fifteenth holy Roman emperor. During his reign he was renowned for the ways in which he proved that for him faith was a life-changer.

I mention this on the second Sunday of Easter because today's readings from our sacred scriptures have told us how life-changing it is to be a believer in the risen Christ. The new converts to Christianity, about whom the first reading told, embraced a whole new lifestyle. It might not be one we would wish to choose – owning everything in common? That sounds great until someone uses your iphone and breaks it! – but we know don't we that our faith in the risen Christ is to be a life-changer. Otherwise, what's the point of it? To embrace the Christian life is to march to a different tune, to see the world differently. As St Peter puts it in today's second reading, it is to be sure of the end to which our faith looks forward, that is the salvation of our souls. No wonder that we who embrace the Christian life choose at Easter to singalong with the psalmist, 'the work of the Lord is a marvel in our eyes.' Or that at our Sunday Mass we profess our faith, continuing the tradition started in 1014 by Henry II.

The gospel today proclaimed that the risen Christ changed the lives of the disciples. 'They saw the Lord and were filled with joy.' Among them is St Peter, who took his belief cross the Mediterranean to martyrdom in Rome and St John who wrote down his belief and shared it until he died peacefully on the Greek island of Patmos. According to tradition the other disciples took their Christian belief and shared it far and wide, among them St Thomas. How sad that he who so boldly professes his faith saying 'My Lord and my God' is known to history as the one who doubted when in fact his belief was so strong it took him all the way to Kerala in India. Believing

in the risen Christ really was for each of the disciples a life changer. How true is this for you and me?

Last Sunday Pope Francis told the crowds gathered in St Peter's Square that the foundation of our Christian existence is helping those in need. He asked Christians everywhere to be instruments of Christ's outreach. As a parish we already do this to an extent – think of Insight our mental health support group which meets here on a Tuesday or of our generosity during Lent to the charity Mary's Meals which I'm told by those who've been busy counting all the money in those blue mugs looks set to be our biggest collection for many years - but as a parish we could reach further. I'm sure the same is true for our own personal efforts to be instruments of Christ's outreach. How far do we allow our faith to be a life-changer?

That German emperor who decided we should recite the Creed at Mass every Sunday was renowned for the ways in which he showed that faith was a life-changer. In his generous acts of charity he was very much an instrument of Christ's outreach. He picked up what the disciples started, responding to the commission given them by Jesus on Easter Day; 'As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.' That commission is now ours to pick up and run with. So let us pray that Jesus, our Lord and God, can show us where we can best do some good and be of use. Let's be ready to behave in such a way that we infect people with the joy of the gospel, the joy the disciples had when they saw the risen Lord. Henry II, King of Germany and Holy Roman Emperor back in the eleventh century is not someone most people have heard of, but now you have, when you recite the Creed with me on this eighth day of Easter let's pray that like him our faith will be a life changer.