

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Gospel: John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then 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." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

REFLECTION 1: FORGIVE – THE EASTER MESSAGE

Pope Francis reminds us, 'Faith must be renewed and refreshed again and again. God does not gift us faith by dictating abstract truths: God made himself known in history by entering it with us'. Then the pope said that faith is not genuine unless it is tinged with a trace of doubt. This Sunday Thomas demonstrates more than a trace of doubt when he declares, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and my hand into his side, I will not believe' (John 20: 19-31). Faith is already present in our lives. We need only take time to remember when God entered into our personal life at baptism when we can say with Thomas, 'My Lord and my God'.

The Gospel today holds a sense of fear among the disciples who are huddled together in a room behind closed doors. In spite of reports about an empty tomb, the disciples remain uncertain. Suddenly Jesus appears among them. He greets them with words of peace and shows them his hands and his side. The risen body of Jesus still retains the wounds, no longer now the signs of suffering but of victory. After he has greeted his disciples, Jesus breathes on them giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' resurrection marks the beginning of a new creation and the disciples of Jesus receive the Spirit to proclaim the message of Easter – no longer now trapped by memories of sin in an old world of fear. Forgiveness and its power to transform people with new life, is at the heart of the Easter message. Mutual forgiveness was the only way people could form a living community. Jesus wishes to assure us that although we have never seen, heard or touched his historical presence; we are not disadvantaged compared to those who had.

Notice how the risen body of the Lord still carries the marks of the nails. People are often wounded by life. They carry the scars of physical wounds as well as the hidden wounds of neglect, abuse or psychological

damage done in childhood. The wounds of Jesus were not miraculously sealed over when he emerged from the tomb; rather they were transformed so that they became signs of new life.

The story is told of a lady in Roundwood who worked at pottery as a hobby. After completing a prize piece of pottery, she accidentally let it fall. It was smashed. She tried to mend it, but many small pieces went missing. Rather than discard it she used it as a candleholder. To her astonishment the places where the bits were missing allowed the light of the candle to escape and cast beautiful shadows on the wall. She learned a valuable lesson – sometimes through our wounds the light shines brightest.

REFLECTION 2: CELEBRATING OUR ROOTS

We can't believe our eyes anymore. When we look at a movie like 'Jurassic Park' or the blockbuster 'Avatar', computer-generated imagery continues to numb our senses. Today's technology creates worlds that aren't really there. If Jesus were to appear to us today as he did in the upper room on the day of his resurrection, we would probably be like Thomas. We might doubt our eyes and need to have more proof. Jesus blessed those who believed without seeing and he challenges us today to do the same.

Jesus in fact anticipated that some might be tempted to doubt their resurrection faith. The experience of Thomas has been recorded in today's Gospel (John 20: 19-31) to affirm some important points. You see, through the exchange with Thomas, John the Evangelist affirmed that the body of Jesus was not an illusion or vision. It was real, and as the wounds attested, the crucified Jesus and the risen Jesus were one and the same person. The Thomas episode spoke directly to a problem that troubled the Early Church – how could one believe without having seen the risen Jesus? During the first decade after Jesus' death and resurrection, those who had no experience of the risen Jesus believed the testimony of those who had. But when these eyewitnesses began to pass on, the problem grew more acute. Through the encounter with Thomas, the Evangelist illustrated that seeing first-hand was no guarantee of faith. Thomas, remember, saw and yet did not believe. It was only when Thomas moved beyond the sensational aspects of the resurrection that he came to faith. Instead of touching Jesus, he allowed himself to be touched by the grace Jesus extended to him as he challenged, 'Do not be unbelieving but believe'. Thomas' response 'My Lord and my God' reflected the Church's deepening understanding of Jesus as Lord of all and as an equal of God the Creator of All. Thomas' profession of faith also spoke to the experience of the community in which the fourth Gospel (St John's) was developed.

Domitian, who was Emperor at the time, was demanding to be worshipped as divine. 'Our Lord and God' was the title by which he demanded to be addressed. Those who would not comply were persecuted and many were martyred. Through Thomas' declaration of Jesus as his Lord and God, the Evangelist wished to encourage his readers to resist their persecutors and remain true to their faith.

Those who would persevere were blessed by the risen Jesus. That same blessing is spoken in our hearing to encourage our continued faithfulness to him in these days when our own faith is severely challenged – 'my Lord and my God'.