

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 20:29

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

You believe in me, Thomas, because you have seen me, says the Lord; blessed are those who have not seen me, but still believe!

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel John 20:19-31; L44B

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."

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve,
was not with them when Jesus came.
So the other disciples said to 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 into the nailmarks
and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

Now a week later his disciples were again inside
and Thomas was with them.
Jesus came, although the doors were locked,
and stood in their midst and said,
"Peace be with you."

Continued in Appendix A, p. 293.

Reflecting on the Gospel

Have you ever heard news that seemed too good to be true? Maybe that a friend was visiting, or that something special was in store for you? Perhaps the news was so good or unexpected, we needed "to see it to believe it." We might be reminded of the motto of Missouri, the "show me" state. There is a healthy skepticism we bring to the table. We don't want to get our hopes up only to be disappointed. We want proof, demonstrable proof. This is precisely Thomas's reaction on hearing the news about Jesus' resurrection.



Though the disciples had been witness to the risen Lord on Easter Sunday evening, Thomas was absent, and so he functions as a disciple for all of us. In a sense, we stand in the person of Thomas. We were not present that Easter Sunday evening. And perhaps, like Thomas, we reply, "seeing is believing." The beatitude that Jesus speaks to Thomas is meant for each of us: "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

The church gives us this reading on the Second Sunday of Easter, as that is when Thomas had his experience of the risen Lord. Though we are not given the opportunity to put our finger in the nail marks (and the gospel doesn't say that Thomas did that), we, like Thomas, may condition our belief on seeing.

The gift Jesus gives his disciples is "peace." It is not a peace that the world gives, that is, merely an absence of war. But the peace Jesus gives is a serenity in the face of life. The gift is a sense of calm

knowing that Jesus is "my Lord and my God," and that there is nothing in this life that can separate him from me. The reader of this gospel recalls Jesus' prayer to the Father in the garden, about not losing a single one who has been given to Jesus. In this gospel, Jesus calls us friends. And it is a friendship that can never be broken; its hallmark is "peace."

Living the Paschal Mystery

Perhaps it is something in the human condition that we do not automatically believe good news, or news that might seem too good to be true. That can be a natural defense mechanism. But today we learn that God wants to surprise us with joy. He wants us to live in the life of the resurrection. Rather than be skeptics, he wants us to be joyful in the knowledge that his love is greater than even death.

Our own experiences of loss can be transformed with the power of God's love. The marks of loss will always be there, as Jesus' body was marked with the signs of the cross; but something greater is in store. We can never take away the experience of loss, the experience of death, and the experience of tragedy. But those experiences can be made new. Being made new does not mean that the loss was OK. Rather, in spite of the loss, in spite of the transgressions, and in spite of death itself, God has another reaction. He raises to new life. God transforms pain, loss, and abandonment into life, peace, and wholeness. This is the ultimate paschal mystery that is lived out in our daily lives countless times with relationships, friendships, family, work, and even the cycles of nature. Every fall and winter is succeeded by spring and summer. New life abounds, and because of this we celebrate.

Focusing the Gospel

John 20:19-31

The gospel for the Second Sunday of Easter (for all three years of the Lectionary cycle) is what we might call act 2 of John’s Easter drama, if act 1 was the discovery of the empty tomb. Scene 1 takes place on Easter night. The terrified disciples are huddled together, realizing that they are marked men because of their association with the executed Jesus. The risen Jesus appears in their midst with his greeting of “peace.” The writer of the Fourth Gospel clearly has the Genesis story in mind when he describes Jesus as “breathing” the Holy Spirit on his disciples: just as God created man and woman by breathing life into them (Gen 2:7), the risen Christ recreates humankind by breathing the new life of the Holy Spirit upon the surviving company of apostles.

In scene 2, the disciples excitedly tell the just-returned Thomas what they had seen. Thomas responds to the news with understandable skepticism. Thomas had expected the cross (see John 11:16 and 14:5)—and no more.

The climactic third scene takes place one week later, with Jesus’ second appearance to the assembled community—this time with Thomas present. He invites Thomas to examine his wounds and to “believe.” Christ’s blessing in response to Thomas’s profession of faith exalts the faith of every Christian of every age who “believes without seeing.” All Christians of every place and time who embrace the Spirit of the risen One possess a faith that is no less than that of the first disciples.

Focusing the First Reading

Acts 4:32-35

On the Sundays of the Easter season, the first reading is taken from the Acts of the Apostles, Luke’s chronicle of the founding and growth of the church. Acts has been called the “Gospel of the Holy Spirit” because it recounts how the Spirit of God was at work forming this small group of followers on the fringes of Judaism into “the Way” whose members were eventually called “Christian” (Acts 11:26). Today’s brief reading is one of several “snapshots” Luke includes of the idealized community, united in heart and mind, committed to charity and sharing what they had with one another.

PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS

Have you ever been swallowed up in Thomas-like skepticism and cynicism? How was that “doubt” transformed into hope and trust?

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In what ways is your parish community like—or can become like—the first Christian community portrayed in today’s first reading?

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How can we “breathe” new life into our relationships with others?

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Second Sunday of Easter (or of Divine Mercy), April 8, 2018

Gospel (cont.)

John 20:19-31; L44B

Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands,
and bring your hand and put it into my side,
and do not be unbelieving, but believe.”

Thomas answered and said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus said to him, “Have you come to believe because you have seen me?
Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples
that are not written in this book.

But these are written that you may come to believe
that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,

and that through this belief you may have life in his name.