

Jesus' Invitation to Thomas ...and Us  
April 24, 2022  
Gospel of John 20:19-31  
Fr. John

This second Sunday of the Easter season brings us another of the post Resurrection appearances of Jesus to his disciples. According to John's gospel it was on the evening of the very day of the resurrection and the major part of the reading focuses on Thomas's disbelief and forever after the term 'doubting Thomas' has become synonymous with anyone with a cynical attitude.

This, I believe, is grossly unfair to the apostle on a number of counts. Firstly, because whenever his name is mentioned in the gospels, it is not with any negative connotations unlike that of Judas Iscariot. Secondly, any bona fide faith needs to have some healthy skepticism in order for it to grow at a deeper level. Thirdly, tradition has it that Thomas would spend the rest of his life taking the gospel to India where many Christians there trace their faith back to his influence. And finally it may miss a point that John's gospel is also trying to make - namely that we must not be afraid to reach out and touch the wounds of Christ in our brothers and sisters.

We like to think of the faith community, the Church, in terms of the picture painted in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. It is a community where everyone shares generously whatever they have in the spirit of responsible stewardship; where people bring their sick to be miraculously cured; where love abounds, and where the Lord adds to their numbers every day.

Well, in reality, this may not be exactly the Church that we have experienced. And while the Church has displayed some of those above mentioned virtues, it also bears the wounds that the risen Christ displayed to his disciples. While some of these wounds have been perpetrated by outside elements as was the case with Jesus, we also have to admit that many of them have since become self inflicted. In other words, when the Church, as an institution, has been guilty of inhospitality, substituting real compassion with a cold sense of duty. When it has simply gone along with secular authority rather than being a prophetic agent seeking real truth and justice. When it has become only a forum for moral judgment rather than an agent for showing Divine Mercy - then and only then do we recognize the contemporary wounds of the risen Christ.

Our second reading was taken from the Book of Revelation which comes from the apostle John near the end of the first century of the Christian era. By that time the combination of pain and glory, persecution and purification had become a pattern of early church history and indeed has been our story ever since. Jesus himself reflects this fact when he appears to his disciple between Easter and Pentecost. He comes in glory but still bears the marks of the nails and the spear upon his body. They would become a reminder to the disciples of the price that Jesus paid and how they had distanced themselves from him.

It certainly therefore, would have been within his right to severely chastise them for their abandonment of him and the disciples would have known that they had it coming. Instead, Jesus' first words are: 'Peace be with you.' Words of mercy, compassion, and forgiveness rather than judgment, coldness, and vengeance.

So when we, like Thomas, are invited to explore the wounds of Christ in others, how do we go about doing that? Is it only out of curiosity? Is it out of denial - distancing ourselves of having any responsibility? Or can we truly approach those wounds with the kind of compassion, mercy and love which Jesus displayed to Thomas and the other disciples. May these be the healing marks that we leave in our world on this Divine Mercy Sunday!