

Thomas' Dilemma
April 11, 2021, Second Sunday of Easter
Gospel of John 20:19-31
Fr. John

The scriptures for the Sundays of the Easter season present us with two narratives.

On the one hand, the gospels speak of the appearances of the risen Christ to his followers, while the readings taken from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles tell of the response of those early followers to the Resurrection.

In the first instance, the disciples are cast in the role of *passive* witnesses, while in the second they begin to take an *active* role in proclaiming the Good News of Christ's rising from the dead.

This shift from mere observation to transformation is a faith process that is an on-going one, both on an individual level and on a communal basis.

Our first reading today, taken from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles gives us a glimpse of those early Christian communities whereby all its members were totally committed to the welfare of everyone in the group. They shared everything in common and no one claimed private ownership of their possessions, and everyone was taken care of. It seemed like an almost idyllic situation. Outside of groups like the Amish, Bruderhof and Hutterite communities and some Catholic religious orders - that model of Church seems quite foreign to most of us. Perhaps in our understanding of the faith community we call The Church we have become more accustomed to *going to Church* rather than *being Church*. We may identify more with a belief system, its rituals and traditions than the *actions* which Christ modelled for us to follow.

For example, since the time of Pope Leo XIII in the 1890's to the present day, Pope Francis, there have been many papal documents and encyclicals on social justice and the need for a fairer distribution of the earth's goods among all people especially the poor. And yet powerful voices outside and even within the Church have often rejected or simply ignored that aspect of the gospel. As the late Archbishop Helder Camera of Recife, Brazil once said: 'When I *give* to the poor, they call me a saint - when I ask *why* they are poor, they call me a Communist'.

Our struggle with authentically living a genuine Christian life is much like that of the apostle, Thomas. His absence from the gathering at Christ's first appearance indicated a lack of commitment to the community. It underlies our tendency to the rugged individualism that typifies so much of our world view. In addition, his need of physical proof of Christ's resurrection resonates with our reliance on a purely materialistic understanding of reality.

The risen Christ, offers a challenge to each of us as to how we balance our response to the mystery of the Incarnation between that of a materialistic world view and a spiritual

one. Each of these has their strengths and weaknesses. Those who hold strictly to a material world view have given us science, engineering, medicine, and much of what we now call civilization. It has obviously produced much good. However in the last couple of centuries it has come to dominate developed countries that it has taken centre stage and has created a highly consumer oriented and competitive culture which tends to marginalize the poor. The spiritual world view recognizes the primacy of the invisible world and the interior life embraced by philosophy and religious belief including Christianity. However, when taken too far it can become detached from ordinary human needs and remain only on a theoretical basis.

Too often we have kept these in separate compartments and have created dualistic notions of the sacred versus the secular, the flesh versus the spirit and the natural versus the supernatural. Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection brings these supposedly opposites together in a unified oneness. This has a direct implication on how we regard our social, political, practical and immediate concerns. It opens for us a deeper understanding of what the gospel of John stated when it said: 'And the Word [Christ] became flesh and dwelt among us.'

How we understand that statement will determine how we live and integrate Christianity in our everyday lives. It wasn't only Thomas's dilemma, it is ours as well.

May we use this season of Easter to take us to a deeper and more profound understanding of what God has done for us and how the risen Christ is indeed the Way, the Truth and the Life. Amen