

The Second Sunday of Easter.

We cannot be sure why Thomas was not there on that first Sunday when Jesus appeared in that locked room where the disciples were gathered. Perhaps it was fear of punishment or death; perhaps he had something else to do; perhaps the message from Mary Magdala, the first to discover the empty tomb and the second to come to believe in Jesus as the risen Lord, had not reached him.

But this was a small and close knit community and Thomas would not remain out of the loop for long. During those days after the Lord's appearance he received the message. The disciples lived in Jerusalem and they were still practising Jews worshipping at the Temple as well as doing what we are doing on the day of resurrection which was to celebrate the Eucharist. The number of people was possibly about 20-30 and Thomas would have begun to notice how people were beginning to change. There would have been more cooperation and mutual support and as Luke points out in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the disciples were united in prayer, were sharing everything in common and were holding firm to the teaching of the Apostles about the death and resurrection of Jesus. Perhaps too, Thomas was beginning to realise that the works that Jesus did the disciples could now do themselves. We know that those words of Jesus had come true and that the promised Holy Spirit had been given to the disciples and the evidence of change was clear to see. I imagine nothing could keep him away from the gathering in the closed room on the second Sunday evening.

As I imagine Thomas and the others were hoping, Jesus appeared once more. To save any embarrassment that Thomas might have been feeling, Jesus spoke first and offered Thomas his hand and his side so that he might have his wish to touch Jesus' wounds fulfilled. It was a strange request but one that has the most massive significance not only for Thomas but for us all. The sight and experience of Jesus' wounds provides the evidence that the resurrection was not an escape for Jesus. Somehow Jesus took his suffering with him into his resurrection, he experienced it and transformed it into something new and good so that every aspect of his human life, the pain and the joy, would be drawn into the life of God.

As it turned out, Thomas did not need to touch Jesus, the sight of the risen Lord, marked by those signs of his death, was enough. What had happened to Mary of Magdala and John, to Peter and the other disciples, was now God's gift to him. His famous doubt now turned into faith as he confessed Jesus to be his 'Lord and God.' His act of faith should take us back to Christmas and to John's treatment of the Incarnation. Here in Jesus was the Word of God made flesh. After his death and resurrection, Thomas was the first to profess the truth that Jesus was both his Lord and God.

Thomas was not the first to experience this personal coming to faith, nor was he to be the last. The Gospels of the resurrection make it unmistakably clear that each person came to their own relationship with the risen Lord Jesus at their own pace and in their own way. Some had experiences of the risen Jesus, some did not, but all came to the same point of realising that not only was Jesus alive, he was with them in a way that had not been possible in his life on earth. Gradually they came to see that he was closer to each of them than they were to each other.

As we continue our celebration of Easter and our reflection on the Easter mysteries the experience of the early disciples is ours as well. We have not seen him, yet we believe and given to each of us is that unique and precious relationship with the risen

Jesus which is our relationship with God and which we treasure and nurture in prayer.

So let us join those disciples in that locked room and give thanks and reflect on the experience.

St. John makes a point of telling us that the doors were closed. This made no difference to Jesus who was able to come to them regardless of how tight the security might have been. How much energy do we use ensuring our own security? Worrying about this or that; seeking after this pleasure or that possession; building a wall around ourselves because of this or that fear and yet Jesus who is part of our lives is our greatest security and is not impeded in his love for us by anything.

Once through the tight security Jesus stood among them. His personal presence in our lives must give us peace and his presence in our relationships and our community must give us the most massive respect and appreciation of all our relating at whatever level. Simply because it is the Spirit of Jesus who is the medium connecting us to each other. Not only is each person a Temple of the Holy Spirit but our relationships with each other are enabled and nurtured by the Spirit. That is why our relating has to be shaped by peace, joy, love, patience, forgiveness, respect and gratitude.

Once among his disciples, Jesus announced his supreme gift, which is the gift of peace. Trust and prayer, open us to receiving that gift and the growth of peace within. When he used the word Jesus knew that the gift of his Spirit was intended to bring harmony and consolation deep into every human heart lifting the burden of fear and anxiety. He knew that his peace was the means to communication and cooperation between people in love which is the only way to bearing fruit in the growth of humanity. Jesus knew that his peace was the only way to freedom from violence and war which would bring flourishing and well being to all.

So Jesus shows us his hands and his side. Remember that it was from his wounded side that blood and water flowed. The sign of the cleansing, healing, reconciling and life giving gift of the Holy Spirit who day by day draws us into the limitless mercy and love of our risen Lord.