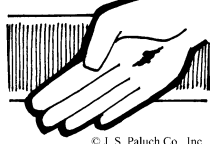


**My Lord
and my
God**



2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER 2008 MARCH 30, 2008

FR. JOE SOBIERAJSKI, S.J.

ACTS 2:42-47 1 PETER 1:3-9

JOHN 20:19-31

In the Gospels he is “Didymus”, the twin, but tradition has called him the unfortunate name of “the Doubter.” Yet Thomas is also the one who said “Let us go to die with Him if we must” when Jesus suggested they return to Judea where the Jews had tried to stone Jesus. There is also a very strong tradition backed by historical fact that says that Thomas was the Apostle of India, and that for many years after landing on the Malabar coast of India, Thomas founded many churches in the Kerala region of India before being martyred in Madras in 72 AD.

Yet, if we think of Thomas our first instinct is to see him in the context of today’s Scripture as the one who says, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in His hands and put my fingers into the nail marks and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” It is unfortunate for Thomas that, being the way that most of us remember him, it is equally unfortunate for us since I believe that most of us share a secret bond with Thomas.

In the locked Upper Room in Jerusalem, the disciples are gathered together we are told for “fear of the Jews.” This is at a point when they have been informed by tearful Mary that the Tomb is empty, a fact that is confirmed by both Peter and John, and at a time when one assumes they have been informed by the now jubilant Mary that she has seen and spoken with the Risen Christ. If Mary’s message has stirred any joy in them or any belief, for that matter, it is difficult to tell. In any case their fear is far stronger than their faith and so they live behind locked doors.

But doors are no obstacles for the Risen Lord. And so, Jesus appears in their midst offering them the “peace” they need to combat their fear. To help them believe, He shows them the hands that were pierced by nails and side pierced by the spear, and then assures them by offering them peace. Immediately He gets about the business of His Resurrection, and gives them the mission given Him by the Father. In what has sometimes been called the Johanne Pentecost, Jesus then “breathes” on them giving them the Holy Spirit, and gives them the power to forgive and retain sins. Thomas, however, misses all of this, not only the seeing and hearing the Risen Lord with His wounds exposed, but also the Gifts of the Spirit, and the great commission, as well as the peace to ease his fear.

How often have you heard this Gospel and said to you, “I would have reacted exactly like Thomas, and with good reason”? I certainly have. Yes, I would have had my doubts, even in the

face of the testimony of these men who were my friends and companions, but more than that I would have felt somehow “cheated”. They saw, they might even have touched the Risen Christ, He gave them a mission, and I missed out on all of it. I would have been angry and hurt. I believe that is exactly how Thomas felt; angry, hurt and even fearful that having missed Christ’s appearance he was no longer part of the group with whom he had spent three years of his life. Christ of course understands these men. He understands Thomas, and so He comes to them again it seems with the sole purpose of reconnecting with Thomas. He speaks to him, shows him His hands and side, and offers him the opportunity to touch His hands and side. With that Thomas makes the most perceptive act of faith yet in the Gospels, “My Lord and my God.” This affirmation of faith does not only recognize Jesus as the Lord who Thomas knew before His Resurrection, it also recognizes the Christ of the Resurrection who is not only Mary’s Son, but the Son of God. His faith sees beyond the human Jesus and embraces Christ’s identity with the Father in the words that describe the one true God of the Old Testament.

Thomas’ declaration of faith is an invitation for us to look beyond our own doubts and fears and to accept Jesus Christ for who He is. We do not have the good fortune to see and touch and talk with the Risen Lord in the same way that Peter, and Thomas and Mary did, but I think it is fair to say that we are not without the experience of the Risen Christ in our own lives. Our First Reading is from the Acts of the Apostles this morning, the ideal community of Christian believers, yet while none of us are ideal, there are characteristics found in that community that we all share to some degree. We do not share our material belongings in the same communal sense that the early communities did. We do not necessarily meet together every day to share our prayer and our food. Yet, we do find Christ’s presence in our prayer together, and in the meal that we share whenever we gather together. As bread broken and wine poured out, Christ’s Body and Blood allow us to know Him in the Sacrament itself and then to encounter Him in each other. The Scripture we read allows us to grow in our understanding of Him and not only what He does, but also what He calls us to do. In following Him we learn to share not only our material goods with those in need, but we also learn to share ourselves through our talents and our self-giving. In that sharing we find the Risen Christ. That is the remarkable, mysterious wonder about the Resurrected Christ: He is constantly here with us and in us as He has been with the Church since the beginning. Just as He was not confined to the grave neither is the Risen Christ confined by time or space as the earthly Jesus was.

Peter’s First Letter speaks about the harsh reality that many of the early Christians had to face. Writing from Rome, Peter encourages a community in Asia Minor who were currently experiencing trials and suffering. He speaks of the hope that is theirs in the Resurrected Christ.

And in their community he can see those that Christ spoke of who have not seen but still believe. Peter concludes: “Although you have not seen Him you love Him: even though you do not see Him now yet believe in Him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy.”

I said earlier that we all shared a “secret bond” with Thomas. Perhaps that bond is not all that secret. It lies in the simple fact that like him we all have our share of doubts and fears when it comes to our faith. Who would deny that there are not moments in our lives when the stress we all suffer does not lead us to question everything in our lives including our faith? We all experience times when we find hope difficult. Reading a newspaper any day of the week can turn our mood sour, and lead us to see nothing but the negative side of human nature. War, murder, addiction, sexual perversion, can paint the picture of a world inhabited by people who have no saving qualities. We might wonder how Christ could find anything in us that was lovable enough to suffer and die for. Yet, as we experience such doubts, there is still the smallest flicker of hope that dwells in our hearts, the seed of faith that will not die, still ready to be fed and nourished by the love of Christ.

When He appeared to the Apostles and offered them His peace, when He did the same for Thomas showing him His hands and side, Christ jump started their lagging faith. With His help and the Gifts of the Spirit. That Risen Christ promised to be with us to the end of time, and has strengthened the faith of each generation of Christians when their faith flagged and needed nourishment. That Risen Christ is still very much among us. Coming to us in word and in Eucharist He enters our lives even when we lock ourselves away somewhere in fear. With Thomas we too might find ourselves unable or unwilling to believe, but if we give Him a chance He will show us His hands and His side in the men and women who, because they bear His Name and believe in Him, continually offer themselves in service to others. Fed by the Eucharist such men and women make Christ present not at some time in the past but today, not simply in the Scripture we hear and read, but in their actions which should be the natural response to Christ’s self-giving in those who believe.