

Homily for the Second Sunday of Easter

April 18-19, 2020

Readings: Acts 2:42-47; 1Peter 1:3-9; John 20: 19-31

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I think Thomas gets a bum rap. He's one of the twelve, known by most of us only as the skeptic; a doubting Thomas who needs to put his fingers into Jesus' wounds in order to believe he had risen from the dead. Yet he may have been one of the more courageous disciples. He demonstrated incredible faith in Jesus when he encouraged the apostles to return to Judea as Jesus learned that Lazarus had died. The others tried to talk Jesus out of returning, because the last time they were there people were ready to stone Jesus to death. It was Thomas who said, "Let us also go to die with him."

And while we don't know where Thomas was when Jesus first appeared, we do know that he wasn't locked in the upper room, hiding in fear. So rather than thinking of Thomas as the doubter, I would like to think of Thomas as an exceptionally brave disciple.

A scene plays out in my imagination as I pray over the gospel reading. When the ten tell Thomas that the Lord appeared to them and brought them peace and healing as they cowered in the upper room, he not only questions that reality but he becomes livid! His anger is astounding to witness.

You see, he was not cowering in fear in the upper room, he was out ministering to the hundreds of Jesus' other followers in the city of Jerusalem, who were equally afraid and hurt and terribly confused—how could it be that their rabbi and their savior had been crucified? Their world had just been shattered and Thomas was out among them, trying to console them and convince them that it is not over, there is nothing to fear, because our Lord told us he would return.

When he heard that Jesus had appeared to the 10 and offered them his peace, Thomas was so angry and jealous that he flew into a rage. "Why you? Why you who have been his trusted pupils, who have lived with him for the past three years? You who have witnessed firsthand all of his miracles? You who he taught to minister to the poor and suffering? You who he told to love your neighbor as you love yourself? Why would he appear to those whose faith should be greater

than all others, but who are cowering in this room while I was out risking my life and ministering to all those who need Jesus most? Why you? I can't believe that Jesus would do that. I need to see him myself!"

So, he waited with them, a long and confusing wait until Jesus came again. There was no questioning at that point. "My Lord and My God" burst from his lips. The moment Jesus appeared Thomas recognized the true divinity of Jesus. This really was his Jesus; it was his Lord.

I recognize that this is my story because I'm feeling the confusion and hurt that I imagined Thomas to experience. On Holy Thursday, I started my first triduum without the Eucharist. I burst into tears at the writing of those words.

Because it is now that I need the true presence of Jesus more than ever. I need the peace and assurance that the Eucharist brings as I and many others continue the work of "essential services" during this COVID crisis. I lead an organization that runs homeless shelters and multiple large congregate care residences for those battling addiction, and I must encourage our front-line staff every day, trying to get them what they need to enable their work and assuring them they will be alright even when I doubt. And so, I feel like my imagined Thomas: angry and jealous. Because more than anything else, I need to experience the true presence of Jesus.

More than once in the past few weeks I admit that I've asked, "Are you here Lord? Prove to me that you are going to be here to protect me, my staff and my family; prove to me that you will bring back the peace of your presence that seems to be slipping through my fingers with every additional day of COVID uncertainty."

So, I wait. I wait to be able to exclaim, "My Lord and my God" when I experience the true presence of our Lord once again. I wait for the peace and healing it will bring. We all wait.