

# “PEACE BE WITH YOU”

## A Reflection on the Gospel for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter

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St John's Gospel is by far the most predominant Gospel throughout the Easter Season. This Gospel passage (John 20:19-31), we hear on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter each year. John 'the beloved disciple' is well qualified to give us the Easter Gospel.

He had witnessed firsthand the crucifixion of the Lord. He had seen the empty tomb. "He saw and he believed, so he wrote (Jn 20:9). John had some 50 + years to reflect on the Person and message of the Risen Christ before he committed his Gospel to writing. Today's Gospel passage is one of the magnificent Easter Gospels. It embraces the whole Mystery of Christ and the Church.

It is so alive, so graphic, and so human and the transformation which the Risen Lord brings about is so vibrant. There is the great commissioning, and the bestowing the Spirit of re-creation so as to impart forgiveness and healing, and of course finally the great 'beatitude'. The Risen Christ is the heart and soul of the Church and the Christian community. In this Gospel scene Jesus identifies with His Church, and He authorises the Church to continue His mission.

To begin with the disciples are a picture of bewilderment, fear, and desperation. They are behind closed doors fearful and petrified. - Jesus found a way in.

"The evening of that same day, the first Day of the Week". There is so much in a few lines! The day of the new creation...**The Light** of the world who was dead and buried has Risen...everything has been re-created. The Risen Lord transforms their fear – they become joyful. Jesus extends to them the great Easter Gift...Peace-Shalom-contentment. The Love and designs of God are greater than Death.

Significantly the Risen Lord still bore the marks of His crucifixion! The image of the closed doors captures the environment currently eclipsing the world, due to the Covid-19 virus. People are so perplexed.! Many have that nagging question that has lingered on even from biblical times: Is God punishing the world for the evils of our time? Whilst the correct answer to the question from a theological and a Christian faith perspective is a definite no; God is not punishing our world, such a God is not the God of Jesus Christ, the question has also complex implications. The fact that the Word of God (Jesus) became flesh and dwelt among us, that reality has a cosmic impact, so too the good and evil that human beings do also have communal consequences.

In due course the investigations of scientists, medical experts, environmentalists, and many others will let the world know of the human causes and contribution to the rapid spread of the Covid-19 virus.

Our challenge now is similar to that of the apostles on that Easter morning is to allow the Risen Lord to transform our fears, and like Thomas to touch the wounds on the Body of Christ, his people: wounds of isolation, suffering, age, helplessness, loneliness, anxiety etc in ways that are practical, and compassionate.

Reading this Gospel passage analytically - Thomas doubts the report of his fellow apostles-, this is no minor issue of discipline or procedure. He doubts the central Christian message: that God raised Jesus from the dead.

There is a home truth there for all of us. There are very few of us who get through life without asking some serious questions about God, about Jesus, the Spirit, the Church, good and evil.

Even though the Apostles were exuberant at their experience of the Risen Lord, Thomas refused to believe their testimony. Yet they remain faithful to him in his doubt. They did not expel him from the group, they held on to him in the hope that he would experience the Lord for himself. Thomas makes a most precious contribution to the overall scene. On the one hand we might label him as the pessimist, the realist, and the drop-out - but ultimately he is indeed the honest one, **for in the climactic moment of John's Gospel it is Thomas, the hesitant one, the doubter, who brings out the full identity of Jesus.**

The one who puts into words the most profound act of faith in the New Testament. **“My Lord and My God.”**

***Blessed are those who have not seen but yet believe***. A blessing that embraces subsequent generations of believing people... and also a reminder that we are in no way disadvantaged by way of comparison with the those who saw and indeed touched the Lord.

The Body of Christ His Church is a wounded Body; we are challenged and reminded that we do not fully experience the Risen Christ unless we address the wounds on His Body. Pope Francis makes this point very emphatically in his Easter message.

The birth of the Church is an ongoing process in every generation. It takes time, and people will be at different stages in their faith at any given time. Our fidelity to one another on the challenging journey of faith is most important, for we are companions on this pilgrimage of faith. May we each experience the Peace of the Risen Lord.