

April 23, 2017
2nd Sunday of Easter - Divine Mercy
Sunday
John 20:19-31



Divine Mercy Shrine - El Salvador City, Philippines

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 (Jesus) said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

24 Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

26 Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." 28 Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of (his) disciples that are not written in this book. 31 But these are written that you may (come to) believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

Background

Most Westerners have become accustomed to a world of visible information. Educators know that some people learn best when information is presented visually. Some people take pride in wanting to see for themselves--Missouri is known as the "show me state." However, in the culture in which Jesus lived, many people did not possess the visual capabilities that we take for granted. In order to maintain some sense of privacy in their culture, deception and secrecy were parts of daily survival. Children were used to spying on neighbors, and locked doors were presumed to be hiding covert activity. In this culture, everyone developed a healthy suspicion and doubt about the truthfulness of others. The way people dealt with discerning the truthfulness of a person's account was to have numerous and notable witnesses.

Unlike the synoptic gospels, John's gospel does not contain a Last Supper/Passover account. Instead, John precedes the passion and death of Jesus with a farewell address. As part of this address Jesus says, "My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. You heard me tell you, 'I am going away and I will come back to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father; for the Father is greater than I." (John 14:27-28) Later in that discourse Jesus again addresses the disciples, "you also are now in anguish. But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. On that day you will not question me about anything." (John 16:22-23a) In the text for this Sunday, John describes how Jesus has fulfilled what he said in that farewell address.

This gospel text is composed of two almost identical appearances of the risen Lord. Both appearances take place on the first day of the week. Both times the disciples are gathered, the doors are locked, Jesus appears in their midst, he greets them with the greeting of peace, and he shows them the wounds of the crucifixion. The repetition of these details draws attention to the ways the two appearances are different. First is the absence of Thomas in the first appearance. When he is told by the others that Jesus has appeared to them, he refuses to accept their word as creditable witnesses of the truth of their testimony. If the others have seen the risen Jesus, he will not believe unless he can not only see but touch the wounds. This leads to the second difference in the two accounts--the fact that Thomas is invited by Jesus to touch the wounds of the crucifixion. Another difference is found in the kind of response the disciples and Thomas have to the presence of the risen Christ before them. In the first visit, they are filled with joy. In the second appearance, Thomas responds with a statement of faith in Jesus as his Lord and his God. The last difference is in the way the appearance impacts those beyond the event itself. In the first incident, Jesus commissions the disciples to be instruments of God's forgiveness. In the second appearance, Jesus describes those who believe, without the unique experience of Thomas and these disciples, as blessed.

Thomas' objection to believing the testimony of the apostles would be familiar to many in the early Church for whom John is writing. John's gospel was the last to be written. Many of those who were now hearing of Jesus had not had a personal experience of Jesus. In fact, even many of those who were now teaching had probably not experienced the Jesus of history either. How could anyone be expected to believe in Jesus if they had no experience of Jesus or the resurrection? The experience of Thomas is one of the ways John is responding to such questions. Thomas first gives voice to their objection. But when he finally comes to faith, it is not because he has seen or even touched the wounds of Jesus, even though he has now had the opportunity. He is brought to faith by accepting the word of Jesus to him, the invitation, and that Jesus desired to seek him out so that he not remain in ignorance.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you presume that most people speak truthfully?
2. Do you recall an incident when others doubted your truthfulness?
3. Jesus enters the room where the disciples are gathered and greets them with "Peace be with you." Who are the people who have brought peace into your life?
4. Do you bring peace into the life of others?
5. The gospel text says that Jesus showed the disciples his hands and his side, and that the disciples rejoiced when they saw him. It seems to be implied that they rejoiced to see the signs of his passion. How do you make sense of this?
6. Are there places in your own life where you find meaning and even joy in what you have suffered?
7. What are some of the things Thomas might have been thinking when he heard the others tell him of Jesus' appearance to them?
8. How do you think the disciples felt when Thomas told them that he not only did not believe them, but that he would never believe unless he touched the wounds of Jesus?
9. Are you surprised that Thomas was still with them a week later when Jesus returned? What do you think that week was like for Thomas, for Peter, and for the other disciples?
10. How would the Church have been different if Peter had insisted that Thomas either accept their testimony and believe, or separate himself from the group?
11. How many times in the gospels do people seek to touch Jesus? How many times does Jesus seek to touch another?

12. How might the church be different without both of these two stories of Jesus coming to the disciples in the midst of their fears and doubts?

<http://il-ritiro.org/gospel-reflections.aspx>.

The reflection and questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel.

