

19th April 2020 (2nd Sunday of Easter, Year A)

Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 117(118):2-4,13-15,22-24; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20: 19-31.

'Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.'

Faith is not easy. To trust in a God we have not seen is a very difficult proposition. Instead of engaging with this God of love, many chose to declare that there is no God.

The twelve disciples had lived with Jesus for three years. They had spoken to him, listened to him, ate with him and touched him. They were not talking about someone they had never physically encountered, yet one of them betrayed him, another one denied ever knowing him, and nine disappeared. Only one, the beloved disciple, stood underneath the cross until the end.

After the crucifixion, the remaining eleven disciples locked themselves away; they were afraid of the leaders of the Jews. Perhaps they were also embarrassed with each other because they had deserted Jesus at the most important moment of his life? Perhaps they were not sure how to defend themselves if they were to meet him again?

Amidst this chaos, Jesus breaks through the closed doors and stands among his disciples bringing them the gifts of peace and joy. Jesus was not angry at his disciples; instead he called them his brothers and gave them his Spirit to remain with them. It was now their duty to carry on the mission the Father had entrusted him. They had to go out and speak about God's great mercy, forgiveness and love.

Thomas, one of the eleven disciples, was not with the others when Jesus appeared. The rest of the disciples tried to share with Thomas the joyful news that Jesus had risen from the dead. It seems that Thomas had already decided this was a step too far for him to take. He could not accept that Jesus had risen from the dead. How could this be? No one has risen from the dead before!

At his friends' insistence, Thomas changes his position: he would be ready to believe if he had the opportunity of seeing Jesus face to face, and checking for himself the wounds of the crucifixion. Thomas' faith was tentative and conditional. He was not ready to place his blind belief in what the others were saying. I would only believe if he could see the Jesus he had been used to.

At times we try to make conditions on God, telling him how and in what way he should make himself known to us. We think we can own and contain Jesus and God. We often want to hold on to what we are sure about, not giving ourselves the opportunity to see the newness of God.

Jesus comes again to visit the apostles. Once again, they are behind closed doors. Nothing can hold the risen Jesus. He can walk through closed doors and through closed hearts. This time Thomas is there. Jesus' risen body does carry the wounds of the crucifixion and Jesus invites Thomas to come forward and confirm for himself that Jesus was truly risen, truly alive. Now Thomas can believe and declares: 'My Lord, my God!'

It is no longer possible for us to see Jesus physically today. We can only trust the witness of the apostles who saw Jesus face to face. Like Thomas we too need to make our own journey of faith from unbelief to partial belief to full faith. The first step is to tentatively believe in Jesus. We accept the teachings of our parents and the teachings taught to us by our teachers. This is a good foundation but is certainly not enough.

We hopefully move on the next stage when we want to see and touch Jesus. We want to hold on to the Jesus we have always known. The Jesus Thomas knew had the marks on the cross; according to him that was the only possible Jesus available. Jesus invites Thomas to let go of his certainties and to trust Jesus fully. It is like the swimmer who wants to swim while still hanging on to the shore. You cannot both trust God and have your own security at the same time. To trust is to let go and to let God be God in your life!

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