

DOUBTING THOMAS: FEAR-LESS, FORGIVEN, FAITH-FULL

Second Sunday of Easter – Cycle C – 28 April 2019

Divine Mercy Sunday

Readings: Acts 5:12-16; Rev 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19; Jn 20:19-31

“Thomas answered him: ‘My Lord and my God!’” (Jn 20:28)

Three Scriptural Signposts

1. While today’s readings help us to reflect upon the newfound faith and fearlessness of Jesus’ apostles who were totally transformed after they personally experienced the power and presence of their Crucified-Risen Lord, we could specifically focus on St Thomas, the Apostle of India! Unfortunately, Thomas is sometimes seen in bad light as ‘doubting Thomas’. However, if we piece together fragments of Thomas’s life as portrayed in the Gospel according to John, we get a different picture. First, in John 11:16, soon after Lazarus’s death, when the other apostles are afraid to go back to Judea—where some Jews had attempted to stone Jesus—Thomas alone seems fearless, saying: “Let us also go, that we may *die* with him.” Second, in John 14:5, when Jesus explains that he is going to prepare a heavenly home for his followers, Thomas makes a relevant observation and says: “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” From these two references we can sense that Thomas is both, a fearless as well as a wise and ‘thinking’ apostle who likes to get to the heart of the matter before proceeding.
2. The post-resurrection apparitions of the Crucified-Risen Lord somehow always have two points of reference: (a) the wounds of the crucifixion; and, (b) the glory of the resurrection. There is always a continuity-in-discontinuity in Christ’s story of salvation, which the apostolic ‘witnesses’ must proclaim through their words, worship, works, and ultimately even through their ‘blood-witness’ as martyrs for the faith. In today’s rather long gospel passage, we first have the Risen Lord giving a *darshan* to his apostles [without Thomas being present, of course]. Later, Thomas bases his belief on his ‘*firsthand* experience’ of the wounds of Jesus’ passion. Did he really touch the wounds? No one knows! However, at the tomb of Apostle Thomas beneath San Thome Cathedral in Chennai, there is Caravaggio’s famous painting of Thomas actually putting his finger into Jesus’ lanced side. Evangelist John makes no mention of Thomas touching Jesus; but Jesus *touches* Thomas, who exclaims: “My Lord and My God!” This is a most touching proclamation of Easter faith, which is everyday repeated among tribal communities in Gujarat at consecration-time of the Mass: “*Hey maara Prabhu! Hey maara Parameshwar!*” Thomas receives a mild reproach from Jesus: “You believe because you can see me, *blessed* are those who have not seen and yet believe!” This is the last ‘Beatitude’ of the gospels, and the second of two ‘Beatitudes’ in the gospel of John (the first being 13:17: “*Blessed* are you if you *do this*” referring to washing of one another’s feet).
3. The first reading from the ‘Acts of the Apostles’ describes the deep faith of the early Christian community who believe in Jesus not because they have seen Him,

but simply because they have seen, heard and experienced his apostles—all of whom are Christ-like in their life and Spirit-filled in their ministry. Let's not forget that these apostles are sent out in the power of the Spirit: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit!" The renewed faith, the fearlessness, the healing touch, and the power to forgive sins are all signs of the newborn Church—now continuing the ministry entrusted to Christ by His Father, and now handed over to them in the power of the Holy Spirit. "More than ever believers *were added* to the Lord—multitudes of men and women." Note that there is a passive construction in this sentence, i.e., the "*were added*" suggests that it was *not* the disciples, but God alone who added to the Church-Body.

Linking the Second Reading and the Psalm: Today's second reading and the second readings for the next five Sundays are taken from the Book of Revelation, which is not always easy to understand since the book is full of symbols and imagery. Anyway, the revelations by an angel to John bear a common theme – namely, in the battle between good and evil, it is ultimately good (God) that will triumph. The reading encourages believers to hold on to the faith with hope since God will bring all things to final fulfillment. This theme finds echo in the psalm (118) which proclaims, "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good; God's steadfast love endures forever!" God loves you, forever!

Two Contextual Concerns

The Crucified-Risen Christic Concern: The 'Body of Christ', the Church, will ever bear the marks of Jesus' passion. The burning Notre Dame cathedral, Paris, shocked us because a church-building was razed; but, even worse, we are still to come to grips with the bombings in 3 Sri Lankan churches leaving close to 300 Christians dead. Amidst the terror, terrorism, darkness and death, we still believe that HE is with us, showing us his wounds. He calls us to reecho: "My Lord and My God!"

The Concern for Mercy and Global Reconciliation: Not only Jesus' first apostles, but You and I, today, are called and 'com'-missioned with Christ to be agents of reconciliation and mercy. He says: "As the Father sent me, even so I send YOU" We simply cannot expect bishops, priests and nuns to be the sole 'ministers' of mercy and reconciliation, but each and every Christian—anoined as s/he is with the Holy Spirit—is called, chosen and 'com'-missioned to be reconcilers 'with' Christ in a broken, sinful and a seemingly hopeless world.

In Lighter Vein: A fable says that the Risen Lord appeared to his disciples by the Sea of Galilee while they were out, fishing. Thrilled, the disciples cried out, "Master, walk across to our boat!" Jesus began walking on the water. But, after covering some distance, He began to sink. Alarmed, the disciples rowed their boat to help the sinking Jesus and managed to pull Him aboard. "What happened?" asked Thomas, "You walked on water so easily in your lifetime!" Spluttering, Jesus replied, "Now, I've got holes in my feet!" Jokes apart, the Crucified-Risen Lord always reminds us about the marks of his passion!

Reflection: Lord, forgive us for wanting to enjoy the light of your resurrection without entering into your passion; and also for wallowing in your passion without proclaiming the resurrection. May we see you, touch you, and say, daily: "My Lord and my God!"
