

## Second Sunday of Easter (Sunday of Divine Mercy) Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski April 16, 2023

What do we REALLY know about the Apostles? Most of what we know in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has come to us through tradition; the Bible itself tells us little about most of the Apostles. In fact, other than being included in the lists of the Apostles in the synoptic Gospels, many Apostles have very little said about them in the Bible; for example, Simon the Zealot is otherwise not mentioned. In today's Gospel, Thomas has one of his three speaking parts, all in the Gospel according to John. Thomas utters the words that forever branded him as "Doubting Thomas: "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will NOT believe."

I believe that Thomas got a bad rap, an undeserved reputation, for doubting. For you see, in the opening of today's Gospel reading, ten Apostles—minus Thomas—are gathered together. Since they abandoned Jesus during his passion and death, they are ashamed and disconsolate, cowering behind locked doors in fear. They were probably questioning why they spent three years with their now deceased leader, Jesus, and more importantly, questioning what they're going to do next? **They must be full of questions—full of doubt; doubting Apostles—one and all!**

Suddenly, Jesus appeared in their midst, offering them his peace and commissioning them to proclaim the "good news" of God's kingdom, just as God the Father sent Jesus into the world.

Alas, Thomas, not being with them during Jesus' appearance, has questions about the disciples' claim that Jesus has risen. For Thomas was pretty good at asking questions:

Earlier in John's Gospel, during the Last Supper, in response to Jesus' comment, "Where I am going, you know the way," Thomas asked "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus answered with "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

In both instances, Thomas' uncertainty, his doubt, led to questions, which led to Jesus' answers, which led to an increase in faith. Asking questions was also done by another Thomas, the theologian Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica*, his compendium of the main theological teachings of the Catholic Church, which was written in a question/answer format.

The question from today's Gospel: "Did Jesus really rise from the dead" was most probably being asked by the community to which St. John was writing this gospel. In fact, there are those who are still asking that question today! How are we to know that Jesus is risen if we have not seen it for ourselves?

Jesus' last words in today's Gospel passage are: "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." Those who have not seen have faith in the risen Lord because we have trust in the testimony of those who have seen. St. Paul, being among the last to have a personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus, tells us that "more than 500" people were witness to the resurrected Jesus (1Cor 15:6). How do we know that these people were not lying? Simply because all of them, many of whom were martyred for that belief, went to their graves insisting in their belief in the resurrected Lord. Would they have endured such persecution, torture and agonizing death for something they knew was a lie? Over the last two thousand years, we also have had innumerable saints and martyrs, none of whom would have personally seen the risen Lord, put their faith in the testimony of those who saw with their own eyes.

However, I don't believe that we can count ourselves among "those who have **not seen** and have believed," because Jesus continues his work today in the ministry of the Church, which Jesus commissioned for the forgiveness of sins and to preach the "good news." We see it; we experience it:

- Whenever we have a personal encounter with the risen Christ in the breaking of the bread in the Eucharist,

- Whenever we hear the voice of God in our readings,
- When we see the work of Christ in those, such as the volunteers at Morning Glory Ministries, who serve the poor and downtrodden.

So, our faith is in the risen Jesus: The faith we confess as a Catholic community, and will do so again in a few moments, when we profess in the Apostles Creed, "...on the third day he rose again from the dead..."

In the end, Thomas, by way of his questioning, is more theologian—like Thomas Aquinas—than doubter, because he asked questions that increased the faith. So, when we have doubts (like the Apostles), let us not be discouraged; rather, let us ask those questions (like Thomas), seeking answers that will (also like Thomas) bring us a more profound sense of faith in the risen Christ: "[Our] Lord and [our] God!"