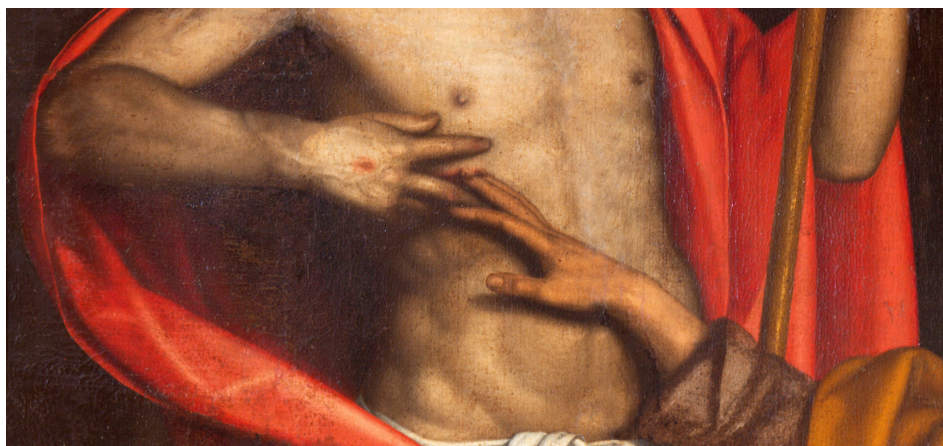


**SUNDAY GOSPEL***Experiencing the Risen Lord**John 20:19-23, 26-31*

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are



forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger

here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.' ■

GOSPEL REFLECTION*Fr Mark De Battista*

The passage today includes two apparitions which encompass the Sunday of the resurrection and the following Sunday as well. The Lord Jesus wants to affirm his disciples in their weak faith which is the greatest mercy he could show them at this time. He greets them with the words "peace be with you". He repeats this three times throughout the passage thus demonstrating how urgently Our Lord wants his peace to come and reign in the hearts of his first disciples. In this way he fulfils his own counsel to the seventy-two disciples

when he instructed them to "let your first words be 'peace to this household...'" (Lk 10,5)

St John is at pains to show that the closed doors present no obstacle to the Lord Jesus by repeating the phrase twice. The original Greek does not indicate a movement towards the centre of the gathered community as if entering through the door and moving into the centre. Rather, it has Jesus immediately standing in their midst thus showing that the status of the risen body overcomes the conventional boundaries of the physical world as we know it. The nature of the risen body of Jesus is further demonstrated by the verb

'to put' when referring to Thomas' hand being placed in the holes of the nails. This same verb may also be translated as 'to thrust' or 'to hurl' thus giving the sense that Thomas' action is indeed dynamic as it comes in contact with the novel reality of the resurrection. The phenomenon is that there is something solid present, yet altogether new.

Thomas then makes the astonishing response, "my Lord and my God". In one movement he transitions from the physical presence of Christ, which he could see, to the divinity of Christ which he could

not see. What happened? At the moment when Thomas touched the wounds of Christ, Christ touched the wounds of Thomas by healing him of his doubts and transforming him into one who believes. At last Thomas' faith is restored and he recognises the full identity of Christ Jesus. ■

A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS

Today is the eighth day after Easter, and the Gospel according to John documents for us the two appearances of the Risen Jesus to the Apostles gathered in the Upper Room, where on the evening of Easter Thomas was absent, and eight days later, he was present.

Thomas was one who was not satisfied and seeks, intending to

confirm himself, to have his own personal experience. After initial resistance and apprehension, in the end even he was able to believe, even though through effort, he came to believe. Jesus waited for him patiently and offered himself to the difficulties and uncertainty of the last to arrive. The Lord proclaimed "blessed", those who believe without seeing the first of which is Mary his Mother. He also met the needs of the doubting disciple: "Put your finger here, and see my hands..." In the redeeming contact with the wounds of the Risen One, Thomas showed his own wounds, his own injuries, his own lacerations, his own humiliation; in the print of the nails he found the decisive proof that he was loved, that he was expected, that he was understood. He found himself before the Messiah filled with kindness, mercy, tenderness. This was the Lord he was searching

for, he, in the hidden depths of his being, for he had always known He was like this. And how many of us are searching deep in our heart to meet Jesus, just as He is: kind, merciful, tender! For we know, deep down, that He is like this. Having rediscovered personal contact with Christ who is amiable and mercifully patient, Thomas understood the profound significance of his Resurrection and, intimately transformed, he declared his full and total faith in Him exclaiming: "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28). Beautiful, Thomas' expression is beautiful!

He was able to "touch" the Paschal Mystery which fully demonstrated God's redeeming love. All of us too are like Thomas: on this second Sunday of Easter we are called to contemplate, in the wounds of the Risen One, Divine Mercy, which overcomes all human limitations and shines on the darkness of evil and of sin. ■

TALKING POINTS

1. Both Fr Mark and Pope Francis highlight the healing power of encountering Jesus we find in the story of Thomas. In touching Jesus, Jesus heals the deep wounds in Thomas that surface in doubt and fear. This leads Thomas to proclaim, "My Lord and my God"! It is the encounter with Jesus that transformed him. How do we encounter Jesus in our lives? What effect does it have on us?
2. Catholic theologian GK Chesterton said, "Let your religion be less of a theory and more of a love affair". We are all Thomas, invited to a personal encounter, a love affair with our saviour. Do you have doubts or fears about your faith that, like Thomas, need a personal encounter with Jesus?

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for each other: Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them.

Reflect: Take some time to pray focusing on the image of Jesus and Thomas in this week's Faith Circles. Call to mind any doubts or fears you may have and then ask Jesus to heal you.

Response: *My Lord and my God!*

Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Risen Lord, Saviour of the World and Healer of the broken-hearted, we desire to know you, to love you and to encounter you each and every day. Through your Holy Spirit, draw close to us this day. Let us know your love that casts out all fear. Amen.

