

**GOSPEL***John 20:19-31*

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you,' and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you.'

'As the Father sent me,  
so am I sending you.'

After saying this he breathed on them and said:  
'Receive the Holy Spirit.

For those whose sins you forgive,  
they are forgiven;  
for those whose sins you retain,  
they are retained.'

Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. When the disciples said, 'We have seen the Lord,' he answered, 'Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe.' Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him:

'You believe because you can see me.

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

There were many other signs that Jesus worked and the disciples saw, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name.

**REFLECTION OF POPE FRANCIS***16 April 2023*

Today, Divine Mercy Sunday, the Gospel recounts two apparitions of the Risen Jesus to his disciples, and in particular, to Thomas, the "doubting Apostle" (cf. Jn 20:24-29).

In reality, Thomas is not the only one who struggles to believe. In fact, he represents all of us a little bit. Indeed, it is not always easy to believe, especially when, as in his case, one has suffered a tremendous disappointment. After a huge disappoint, it is difficult to believe. He had followed Jesus for years, running risks and enduring discomforts. But the Teacher was put on a cross like a criminal, and no one freed him. No one did anything! He is dead and everyone is afraid. How can he trust again? How can he trust the news saying He is alive? There was doubt inside him.

Thomas, however, shows that he is courageous. While the others are closed up inside the Upper Room out of fear, he goes out, running the risk that someone might recognize, report and arrest him. We could even think that, with his courage, he would have deserved more than the others to meet the Risen Lord. Instead, precisely because he is away, Thomas is not there when Jesus appears to the disciples for the first time, on Easter evening, thus missing that opportunity. He had distanced himself from the community. How could he get [the opportunity] back? Only by going back to the others, returning there, to that family he had left behind, scared and sad. When he does so, when he returns, they tell him that Jesus had come, but he struggles to believe. He wants to see his wounds. And Jesus satisfies him: eight days later, he appears again in the midst of his disciples and shows them his wounds, his hands, his feet, these wounds that are the proof of his love, that are the ever-open channels of his mercy.

Let us reflect on these facts. In order to believe, Thomas wants an extraordinary sign — to touch the wounds. Jesus shows them to him, but in an ordinary way, coming in front of everyone, in the community, not outside. As if saying to him: if you want to meet me, do not search far away; remain in the community, with the others, and don't go away. Pray with them.

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Break bread with them. And he says this to us as well. That is where you will find me; that is where I will show you the signs of the wounds impressed on my body: the signs of the Love that overcomes hatred, of the Pardon that disarms revenge, the signs of the Life that conquers death. It is there, in the community, that you will discover my face, as you share moments of doubt and fear with your brothers and sisters, clinging even more strongly to them. Without the community, it is difficult to find Jesus.

Dear brothers and sisters, the invitation given to Thomas is valid for us as well. We, where do we seek the Risen One? In some special event, in some spectacular or amazing religious manifestation, only in our emotions and feelings? Or rather in the community, in the Church, accepting the challenge of staying there, even though she (the Church) is not perfect? Despite all of her limitations and failures, which are our limitations and failings, our Mother Church is the Body of Christ. And it is there, in the Body of Christ, that, still now and forever, the greatest signs of his love can be found impressed. Let us ask ourselves, however, if in the name of this love, in the name of Jesus' wounds, we are willing to open our arms to those who are wounded by life, excluding no one from God's mercy but welcoming everyone, each person like a brother, like a sister. God welcomes everyone. God welcomes everyone.

May Mary, the Mother of Mercy, help us to love the Church and to make her a welcoming home for everyone.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



**Head:** In this Gospel, the risen Jesus appears to the disciples in their fear, shows them his wounds, and breathes the Holy Spirit upon them. What do these actions reveal about the kind of peace and mercy he brings?



**Heart:** Jesus does not reject Thomas for his doubt but meets him with patience and mercy. How open am I to receiving that same mercy in my own weakness, doubts, or fears?



**Hands:** If God truly welcomes everyone, how can I help make my community, parish, or daily relationships a place where people feel that same welcome and mercy?

## PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.