

GOSPEL

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.'

HOMILY OF POPE ST JOHN PAUL II

(Translated from Italian, Excerpt)

14 April 1996

2. The Gospel we have heard shows us Jesus who finds his disciples on Easter evening. He's the one they've been with for so long, he's the same, yet there's something new. He enters through the closed door. His body is different from what he was before. Of his Passion he has kept the traces of the nails in the hands and feet and the wound in his side pierced by the centurion's spear. After entering the Upper Room through the closed door, he greets the Apostles with these words: "Peace be with you!" (*Jn 20, 19*). Therefore, He whom the Father has sent into the world, sends his disciples communicating to them the power of the Holy Spirit.

3. *The Apostles gathered in the Upper Room are witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ.* Thomas, precisely because he initially did not believe, becomes an exceptional witness. It is he who expresses in the most complete way the mystery of which the Resurrection of Christ opens the doors to us: "My Lord and my God" (*Jn 20:28*). Simon Peter had already professed this faith once by answering a question from Jesus: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" (*Mt 16:16*). Now, after the Resurrection, this truth imposes itself with an even greater force: Jesus Christ, true God and true man.

The Apostles are the witnesses of this. Eyewitnesses. The first witnesses. By virtue of this testimony, they are also sent: "As the Father has sent me, so am I sending you" (Jn 20:21). They are the first to be sent. After them others will come and of them Christ will say: "Blessed are those who, despite not having seen, will believe!" (*Jn 20, 29*). They will, in turn, become witnesses because they believed eyewitnesses. And it will be like this from generation to generation.

All of these form the Church of Christ.

5. The Acts of the Apostles describe *the beginnings of the Church*, a community of faith and prayer, a community of the Word and of the Eucharist: "They were assiduous in listening to the teaching of the apostles and in fraternal union, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers" (*Acts 2:42*). Even today, *after twenty centuries*, the Church is still this same community. You find in these apostolic words the foundations of the life of a Christian community. We also read that they praised God and enjoyed the esteem of all the people (cf. *Acts 2, 47*). This phrase recalls, in some way, the double fundamental commandment of love for God and for neighbor. In fact, God is worthily honored when those who adore him respect man, his creature.

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Implement this program of Christian life every day, in prayer and action. I am thinking of the educational and professional training works that you carry out. And I know that many of you generously dispense care to the sick, the disabled and your neediest brothers, without discrimination and selflessly, in collaboration with your Muslim friends. Continue these fraternal services, these works of mercy that give concrete substance to love for neighbor. Sometimes you have to overcome misunderstandings that may derive from history: may the Lord Jesus, whose love breaks down all barriers, give you courage and keep you in peace!

6. The words addressed by the Apostle Peter to the first generation of Christians concern us too. He writes: “ *You (Christ) love him, even without having seen him* ; and now without seeing him you believe in him” and “of the power of God you are guarded by faith, for your salvation, which is about to reveal itself in the last times” (1 Pt 1, 8. 5).

This faith and this hope of salvation unite us closely to the risen Christ. The Apostle Peter testifies to this with these words: “Blessed be God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; in his great mercy he has regenerated us, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, for a living hope, for an inheritance that does not it is corrupted, it does not stain and does not rot. It is kept in heaven for you “(1 Pt 1, 3-4).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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



Head: Thomas is described in this homily by John Paul II as an exceptional witness - rather than the more commonplace ‘doubting’ Thomas. Who have been the exceptional witnesses to the Risen Jesus in your life?



Heart: What do you feel when you read the words in the Gospel - Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe’



Hands: In this Homily we are extolled to give concrete substance to our love of God and Neighbour. What opportunities are you being presented with at this time to put faith into action.

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.’