

**That You May Believe**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter (B)**  
**(Jn 20:19-31)**

In today's Gospel are two resurrection appearances of Jesus. They are important because he appears to the apostles as a group, and it is through the apostles that the Lord will inaugurate the Church. Both take place in the same "upper room" where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper, where in a few weeks Pentecost will be celebrated, and where in fact the Church became headquartered in Jerusalem for several centuries.

**The Pattern of Sunday.** The first of these appearances takes place on Easter Sunday,<sup>1</sup> and the second takes place a week later, that is, today. By means of his resurrection appearances Jesus is establishing the pattern of sacramental life which the Church will follow to this day. We have continued to gather *every Sunday* for 2000 years, to commemorate the Resurrection. And what occurred visibly within the Church during the first 40 days after the Resurrection, continues to occur invisibly in every Eucharist: Jesus our Risen Lord comes into the room where we are gathered, and appears before us while we are "at table" (cf. Mk 16:14), and we recognize him "in the Breaking of Bread" (cf. Lk 24:35).

**The urgency of Mercy.** In his first appearance to the apostles as a group, after greeting the Church ("Peace be with you" – a greeting the bishop continues to use whenever he begins the celebration of Mass), Jesus immediately speaks of the forgiveness of sins. It is the first thing he "sends" his Church to do in his name, by his authority, by his own personal power, which is the power of the Holy Spirit (by "breathing on them," Jesus shows that the Holy Spirit is his very own spirit).<sup>2</sup>

There is almost an urgency to this command, as if Jesus has been waiting for his Passion to be accomplished so that finally the forgiveness of sins might begin. Jesus has been longing for this moment. It was the reason God became Man, the reason for the terrible crucifixion and death: by his blood he has obtained the forgiveness of sins, through his wounds the Mercy of God is showered upon the world. It remains only for the Church to extend this Mercy to the whole world, for all mankind and every nation to place itself safely within the wounds of Christ, within the Divine Mercy. The Church has Christ's power to forgive sins.

**The Need of Faith.** In order for this to happen – in order for Mercy now won to be *applied*, there must be faith, specifically faith in the Resurrection. Without the Resurrection of Christ, there would be no Mercy; there would only be

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<sup>1</sup> In the evening (Jn 20:19), after he had already appeared to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:18), Peter (cf. Lk 24:34), and the two disciples heading into the country (Lk 24:13-35, Mk 16:12).

<sup>2</sup> Greek "*Pneuma*" Hebrew "*Ruah*" means breath, wind, spirit.

a tortured and crucified – and dead – innocent man. The Resurrection, and the life of grace which flows from the Resurrection, is the fruits of the Passion, the goal of what the Son of God sought to accomplish. Therefore it is faith in the *Risen Christ* which the Church must profess, which believers must have.

**St. Thomas the Apostle.** In this regard it was providential that for whatever reason, Thomas who is one of the twelve apostles, was not (cf. Jn 20:24) with the group on that Easter Sunday evening when Jesus appeared to them (despite what St. Mark says – Mk 16:14). Jesus specifically wanted a “doubting Thomas” to be among the apostles, as many of his people will have this similar quality.

**Disbelief.** All of the apostles together with the holy women who went to the tomb, initially concluded as rational human beings, that someone “took the body.” All of the apostles naturally disbelieved Mary Magdalene when she told them she had seen the Lord and that he was risen (Mk 16:11). But Thomas *emphatically* continued to disbelieve even when the Ten told him they too had seen the Risen Lord for themselves, that he wasn’t a ghost, that they had examined his wounds, that he had even sat down and eaten a piece of fish with them (Lk 24:36-43).

Since the Risen Jesus would remain within his Church *Sacramentally* until the end of the age – really and truly but invisibly, hidden in sign and symbol, Jesus knew the testimony of the first apostles would be foundational. And thus St. Thomas’ double disbelief is important, because when he too finally encounters the Risen Lord for himself, the faith he professes is doubly beautiful – and powerful for future skeptics.

**Divinity of Christ.** It is St. Thomas who, after examining for himself the actual wounds of the Crucified, proclaims him, “*My Lord and my God*” (Jn 20:28). This is the highest and most significant acknowledgement of the divinity of Jesus in all of John’s Gospel, the summit and goal of what he set out to accomplish through his Gospel. We now adopt the devotional custom of silently repeating his words when we come to part of the Mass called the consecration, the moment in which the Risen Lord mysteriously “steps into the room.”

What follows this profession of Thomas is the original conclusion of the Gospel of John: “*all these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name*” (Jn 20:30-31). By Thomas coming to this supreme faith, the goal of the Gospel is realized.

St. Thomas finds healing from his doubt through the wounds of Christ. He is able to place his full trust in God, and as an apostle, give testimony to that Mercy to the ends of the earth.

**The Modern Era.** 2000 years later, the Church continues to find the empty tomb, and pass from incredulity and skepticism to faith. In the “modern” era, the era of science and technology, skepticism and doubt are very common. The example of St. Thomas is more important today than ever before.

**St. Faustina.** It was to modern man, the supreme “doubting Thomas,” that the Lord once again appears through the “Divine Mercy” devotion. In the 1930s, the Risen Lord appeared in a special way to St. Faustina Kowalska, a Polish nun. He asked her to have an image made of the way she saw him, and to encourage the praying of a special Litany of Divine Mercy.<sup>3</sup> She complied, and made several attempts to have a portrait made that reflected what she saw. Obviously, no devotional image can ever capture the true glory of the Lord, but the Divine Mercy image is nevertheless a helpful aid to prayer and faith.

**Invitation to Faith.** Through St. Faustina Jesus recalls today’s Gospel, and the way he appeared to her is likely the way he appeared among the apostles. Most noteworthy in the devotional image is the way in which the blood and water which flowed from Christ’s side on the Cross, have become in the Resurrection the source of grace for Baptism, Eucharist, Penance, and all the sacraments of the Church. Together with the revelation of his glorious wounds, the image portrays the Savior’s invitation to faith and trust in him: “*no longer disbelieve, but believe!*”

On this celebration of the Divine Mercy, let us once again place our faith in Christ. Let us follow St. Thomas in professing the resurrection. And whenever you come to Mass, call to mind this vision of the Lord as you prepare to recognize him in the Breaking of the Bread.

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<sup>3</sup> The prayers of the Divine Mercy Chaplet echo in different words, the “Litany of Mercy” which is an ancient part of the Mass, both at the beginning (“Kyrie, Eleison”), and before Communion (“Lamb of God... Have mercy on us”).