

John 20:19-31^{v vi}

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." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." 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." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

^v About the Gospel: John 20:19-31

John's account of the first appearance of the risen Lord shows that Jesus has returned, bringing peace and joy. He shows his wounds to establish that the crucified Jesus and the risen Jesus are one and the same. As he had

promised, he then gives the disciples a mission and breathes upon them the Holy Spirit.

This is the new creation of humanity for eternal life. Just as Jesus' own ministry began with his empowerment by the Holy Spirit at his baptism, so each Christian is similarly empowered for ministry.

Thomas personifies the elements of doubt that arise regarding the resurrection. He expresses his disbelief in exactly the way Jesus had decried. Yet, without touching the Lord, he can still be brought to penetrate the meaning behind the marvel and to make a full affirmation of Christian faith. He consummates the sequence of titles given to Jesus by giving him the ultimate one of God. Jesus' blessing in response to him answers the problem of believers ever since the eyewitnesses died.

Verses 30-31 serve as a summary of John's entire message. They evaluate the content of the gospel, inviting all to come to the understanding of the meaning of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and through belief to share in a saving relationship with him.

^{vi} **Reflection and Response**

On the initial reading of today's gospel, we are tempted to nominate Thomas for the Arrogant Award. He hears of a glorious vision of the risen Christ that other witnesses met with a bewilderment giving way to sheer joy and wonder. And he has the gall to want proof. It's like reading sublime poetry, then asking for the balance sheet.

Yet something likeable in Thomas makes him stand out. Like the student who raises a question in algebra class, he has the courage to articulate what may be puzzling everyone else.

Perhaps we can learn from Thomas that surfacing our doubts rather than burying them may lead to healthier ownership of faith. Jesus never reprimands Thomas for his uncertainties. Rather, he invites him to move through doubt to belief.

We can learn from Thomas that when our faith sags and our conviction waivers, we can look for affirmation to Christ enfleshed in the people around us. Their wounds may resemble his; they may breathe on us with the same life-giving force.

When Jesus exhaled on the apostles, John's first audience would have heard the rumble over the primordial waters, the creative breath of Genesis. Jesus breathed over his followers to make them creators of a new order. He commissions them with touch and breath, those most powerful of instruments.

According to all the accounts of the early Church, the disciples responded whole-heartedly, feeling no burden in the challenges they confronted though most of them lost their lives in the proclamation. Sometimes Easter alleluias ring out in human flesh.