

"No Doubt"

The Gospel tells us that the doors of the Upper Room were shut *"for fear of the Jews."* The Apostles, who had abandoned Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when He was arrested are still in hiding. It would not be until the Holy Spirit was given to them on the Day of Pentecost that they would begin to go out into the world to profess their faith in spite of all odds.

Sadly, in the world today, there are believers that need to be in hiding, because in some places it is illegal to be a Christian in the land in which they live. Did you know that in some places you are not allowed to even own a Bible? You would think that in the 21st Century that faith would have gotten straightened out. Believers are jailed, tortured and far worse – simply because they love Jesus Christ and are not afraid to profess that fact to others. I ask you to please pray for them and give thanks for the courage and strength that the Lord has given to each one of them throughout this entire ordeal.

There is one Apostle who is right in the middle of the action in today's Gospel and his name is Didymus – the twin – also known as Thomas. Many have called him 'Doubting Thomas' because he said that since he was not there during the Lord's first visit on that Easter Sunday Night - that he needed to see for himself that it truly was the Jesus. You remember his words – "let me see the nail marks in His hands, let me see His side that was pierced by the centurion." The very next Sunday - Jesus appeared once again, and this time, He went straight to Thomas and told Thomas: *"Stop doubting, and believe."*

Several other of the Apostles had questions too – it was not just Thomas. In today's Holy Gospel from John 20:19-20 *"Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord."* They apparently didn't receive the peace that Jesus had given them in the initial greeting, because they didn't rejoice until after He proved to them who He was. Maybe it was because the door was locked, and then Jesus' suddenly appeared inside. They might have been stunned and afraid, until Jesus showed them His wounds. When they recognized Him in that "locked" upper room, their joy became so great it just could not be contained. They had received the joy that Jesus had promised them in John 16:22 when He told them when He was speaking of His impending death: *"I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."*

I want to suggest to you that this joy was not only because of what they saw, but it was also from what Jesus had to say to them. Jesus had just given these disciples their marching orders or commissioning, as well as their call to ministry, as Jesus told them, *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* They also received the power to forgive sins: - *"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."* Jesus was giving them His expectations of the job they

would need to do. That is a job that they have passed down through the centuries to those who are ordained priests and can stand and give absolution.

Not only had the disciples seen the Risen Lord, received their call to ministry, and the power to forgive sins – but they also received new life in the Holy Spirit – breathed upon them by their beloved Master. You might be saying, ‘if they received the Holy Spirit – how come they didn’t go out of hiding right away?’ I believe it is because Jesus gave them a part of the Holy Spirit and it wasn’t until the Day of Pentecost that He would open their minds entirely, and the Holy Spirit would fill them and give them all of the gifts, including the gift of tongues. On that first Easter - they must have been ecstatic. Can you imagine their joy? They must have been very excited, and that is probably putting it mildly.

So then Thomas comes back to that room, through the locked door and they meet him right at the door. Can you just picture it? “We have seen the Lord! He was here, and He gave us the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sins ---and on and on and on...” Laying it on heavy. Can you just imagine how Thomas is feeling? He is probably thinking ‘I missed it! I think we all can understand why Thomas was frustrated.

A week later, with Thomas there with the others, Jesus came back into that same locked room and said, “*Peace Be with you!*” Jesus went right to Thomas: “*Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.*” Jesus addresses Thomas’ concerns directly. Thomas’ reaction is like no one else’s reaction in all of Scripture – He says: “*My Lord and My God!*” Thomas proclaims Jesus as “*My Lord and My God!*” Here, near the end of John’s Gospel, we hear the only disciple to ever actually announce Jesus as God. The faith of Thomas clarifies beyond question the identity of Jesus – and he does it for all of us and for generations to come. His faith proclaims Jesus as Messiah, the Christ, the Risen Savior, God Incarnate – God made man - the Living Word: in the simple words, “*My Lord and My God!*”

It would not be until after the Day of Pentecost that the lives of Jesus’ Apostles would be completely transformed by the Holy Spirit to the point that they would go out and endure persecution and even martyrdom. They were not just claiming that Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to them in order to receive some special benefit. They truly believed it! Just compare this courage to how they reacted at Jesus’ arrest and execution. They had scattered and hid. They scattered and hid, they denied and abandoned Him, then they hid in fear. After Pentecost, they willingly endangered themselves by publicly proclaiming the fact that Jesus is the Risen Christ. What happened? Peter went outside with the apostles and he spoke the truth. Over three thousand people, in the second chapter of Acts, gave their lives to Christ and were baptized that day, because of the boldness that the Holy Spirit gave them. They were willing to suffer for their belief that the risen Jesus had appeared to them. Someone once wrote, “Men may be willing to die for what they believe to be true, but they would never die for what they

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know to be false.” These men were about to step out – willing to walk off the ledge. Why? Because they knew in their hearts – that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead.

The words of Jesus are clear and filled with encouragement as He told Thomas, "*Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" (John 20:29) Blessed are those who come to church on the Sunday after Easter Sunday – which is commonly known as ‘Low Sunday’ - usually lower in excitement from Easter Sunday, and lower in attendance too – but God bless you – you have not seen, but yet you still believe! Those words spoke not only to the Apostles and disciples, but they should speak to each one of us, as well.

The Apostle Peter, an eyewitness to these events, gives us these words as a reminder for us who were not there. In his first letter, chapter 1 verses 8 and 9: Peter writes this, and by the way, Mrs. Marilyn is teaching this exact lesson to our children in Children’s Church, "*Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*" You see today’s Gospel message is not about doubting, there can be no doubt about it - but it is about believing in the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. John reminds us in his words given at the end of today’s Gospel message: "*these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*" (John 20:31)

On this Second Sunday of Easter - let us Rejoice in the joy of the Risen Lord that no one can take from us. Absolutely no one can take the God given joy that has been given to you in, through and by the Name above all names, Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus Christ. Of that - there can be no doubt.