

"No Reason to Doubt"

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

Around the world today, there are believers are in hiding, because in some places it is unsafe to be a Christian in the land in which they live. Believers are jailed, tortured and far worse – simply because they love Jesus Christ and are not afraid to profess that fact. Please pray for them and give thanks for the courage and strength that the Lord has given them throughout their entire ordeal.

Right in the midst of the hiding Apostles is one who is right in the middle of the action in today's Gospel. History has given him a doubting nickname, but there is evidence that he spoke up from time to time in the Gospel and asserted himself. That disciple's name is Didymus –the twin - better known as Thomas. But many call him Doubting Thomas, simply because he said since he missed the Lord's first visit that he needed to see for himself that it truly was the Lord.

When Jesus appeared the next Sunday, He changed His direction when He went straight to Thomas and told Thomas: *"Stop doubting, and believe."*

Thomas isn't the only one who had questions about Jesus appearing to others. 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."* The disciples apparently didn't receive Shalom, or peace that Jesus had given them in the initial greeting, because they didn't rejoice until after He proved to them who He was. It could have been because the door was locked, and 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 – He had just commissioned them, if you will:

- They received their call to ministry: – *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."*

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- They 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.”* You talk about a heavy job to do!

Not only had the disciples seen the Risen Lord, received their call to ministry, and the power to forgive sins – but they themselves, received new life in the Holy Spirit – breathed upon them by their beloved Master. You might say ‘if they received the Holy Spirit – how come they didn’t go out just then?’ Because He gave them a part of the Holy Spirit; 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. They must have been ecstatic. Can you imagine that joy? They must have been giddy. They must have been very excited, and that is putting it mildly.

Then Thomas comes back, through that locked door and gets hit right at the door with: “We have seen the Lord!” They go on: “He was here, and He gave us the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sins ---and on and on and on...” Can you relate to Thomas at this point? And all he is thinking is ‘I missed it! It is like going to a GA football game and someone grabs you and talks to you – and right at that very moment – a bomb is thrown, caught and we got a touchdown – and you missed it! You are there in live in person and there is no replay (nowadays they have it on the scoreboard) but you missed it! You are at your child’s soccer game and there is a pace and they nail it for a score --- and you missed it because somebody caught your attention. OR – you are at a gymnastic meet and your child nails the balance beam – but you missed it. You can understand why Thomas was frustrated, ok?

The following week with Thomas there, Jesus came back into that same locked room and said, *“Peace Be with you!” “Shalom!”* Jesus directly addresses 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, his disappointment, his sadness, and most pointedly his doubt. Thomas’ reaction is like no one else’s reaction in all of Scripture – He says: *“My Lord and My God!”* I picture Thomas in my mind’s eye as dropping to his knees, bowing before Jesus, pretty much falling in his face, and saying: *“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 actually announce Jesus as God.

- Others had declared Him the Son of God,
- Others had called him the Messiah,
- And Jesus spoke of Himself as the Son of Man.

The faith of Thomas steps up and clarifies beyond question the identity of Jesus – and he does it for all of us and for generations that will follow. His faith proclaims Jesus Christ, the Risen Savior, is God Incarnate – God made man - the Living Word: *“My Lord and My God!”*

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After Jesus' death, the lives of the disciples were transformed to the point that they endured persecution and even martyrdom. Such strength of conviction shows that they were not just claiming that Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to them in order to receive some special benefit. They really, really believed it! Compare this courage to their character at Jesus' arrest and execution. They scattered and hid. They denied and abandoned him, then they hid in fear. Afterward, they willingly endangered themselves by publicly proclaiming the fact that Jesus is the Risen Christ. They went out of that locked room, and 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 know to be false." These men were about to step out on the ledge – willing to walk off the ledge. Why? Because they knew that they knew that they knew – that Jesus Christ had risen from the death

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 – which is known as 'low Sunday' - usually low attendance – 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 speak to each one of us, as well.

I want to share with you the words of the Apostle Peter, an eyewitness who was there as a reminder to us who were not. In his first letter, chapter 1 verses 8 and 9: Peter writes this, "*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 is 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)

Let us Rejoice in the joy of the Risen Lord that no one will take from us. No government, no president, no prime minister, no dictator, no premier, no police state –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.