**SOME THOUGHTS ON THOMAS, DOUBT AND FAITH**

**OPENING PRAYER**

Gracious God, the human heart is often slow to grasp the impact of the resurrection on all creation, and on our own lives as well. When we doubt, you give us the comfort of your peace. Strengthen us for the challenge and the blessing of bearing your image. Fill us with compassion and forgiveness, so that we reflect your image more clearly. Help us be signs of Jesus’ resurrected life in our homes, our parish, and our community. With full hearts, and in Jesus’ name, we offer you praise and thanksgiving for the amazing love you pour out on us. Amen

**GOSPEL READING SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER**

**John 20: 19 – 31**

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. 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. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So, the other disciples said to 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 into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” Now a week later his disciples were again inside, and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.” Thomas answered and said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.” Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of [his] disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may [come to] believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

**REFLECTION ON THE GOSPEL**

This gospel tells us of the first two appearances Jesus made to his gathered disciples after his resurrection. Both times he appears through locked doors; both times he greets them with the phrase, “Peace be with you” John 20: 21 Jesus is quick to provide assurance and comfort to the ones who followed him and served with him in his earthly life. They are living in fear because their association with Jesus has put them at odds with the powerful. They begin to grasp that what God is doing through Jesus utterly changes the reality of what their life will be from this point on.

The commissioning that happens next is nearly as astonishing as the resurrection itself. With his words, Jesus brings those very human people into his own relationship with God: “as the Father has sent me, so I send you.” John 20: 21 They are to carry on with his work. He does not speak to them about healing the sick and raising the dead; he speaks to them of forgiveness and gives them his own authority over sin! He offers an invitation to explore in a startling new way, the image of God within themselves …that image which is compassion and forgiveness.

Then there is Thomas. Jesus gently chides and challenges Thomas for his need to “see for himself”, but he does not humiliate Thomas. Even in his doubting, Thomas is treated with compassion, forgiveness, and respect. Thomas then goes on to proclaim most profoundly his own profession of faith: “My Lord and my God” John 20: 28 And in this movement from doubt to faith, Thomas stands as a proxy for us. His doubts and questions echo our own. God knows the human heart. The signs that Jesus performed are recorded, and we are given the story of Thomas’ encounter with Jesus so “that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.” John 20: 31

Moments of doubt, fear, and unbelief in the life of faith are unavoidable, even to the strongest believer. Look at Peter, who denied Christ three times and was still chosen as the first leader of the Church!

The story of Thomas gives hope to all of us who have doubted at some point in our lives. For how does the Lord respond to his doubt? He meets it with love. He brings Thomas to understanding. He reaches out and gives Thomas what he needs in order to believe.

The Lord meets our doubt with love and reaches out, takes our hand, and says, “Put your finger here and see my hands…and do not be unbelieving, but believe.”

Thomas represents those moments when we struggle to recognize Christ in our own lives. Those moments when we are met with love and brought back to belief. So really, we can call him Thomas the human, Thomas the awestruck, Thomas the believer. Because in the end, he surrendered to the Lord and returned home to Him.

In our own doubt, fear, distrust, or confusion, let us ask the Lord to give us His peace. To take away our unbelief. To bring us home.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

* What are the “locked doors” of fear in your life that Jesus wishes to pass through and bring comfort and assurance?
* Jesus says to us, “Peace be with you.” In what ways do I find that peace reflected, or not sufficiently, reflected in my life?
* When I doubt, what helps me regain the balance of faith?
* In what ways can I offer comfort, forgiveness, and freedom to others who suffer from doubt?
* Chronicle your faith story: your first experiences of Jesus progressing from fear to comfort to commissioning; doubting to professing. Keep it simple; focus on specific experiences and responses. If you choose, share your story with another.