

## DEACON GEORGE'S HOMILY FOR SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Before they encountered Jesus, the disciples all had their own jobs, their own identities and their own way of life. After they had encountered Jesus, their **lives changed**. Their characters remained the same, and they didn't stop being themselves. They simply found a new way of living. In today's Gospel reading, the disciples now believe that Jesus is gone. And the direction of their lives **changes once again**. They are now a group of people who gather together out of fear. They are very fearful, that they will have to face the same death as Jesus. Their lives are now so rooted in fear, that they lock themselves away. It is whilst they are locked away, that the Risen Jesus comes to them. He does not come to chastise them for abandoning him, but he comes to reclaim them, with his forgiveness and love, through his words of peace. He shows himself to his disciples. And they can see from his hands and his side, that his resurrection does not remove his wounds, of cruelty and suffering. Because the risen Jesus **is** the wounded crucified Christ.

The disciples receive the gift of Peace, and they are filled with great joy. And their lives change **yet again**. They now have a **new** identity and a **new** direction given to them through the gifts they receive from of the Holy Spirit. And then, they are commissioned to share that great joy, by releasing others from sin, through their new power of forgiveness. But there was one disciple missing, it was Thomas, and he had missed seeing the risen Christ. And because he didn't **see** Jesus, Thomas therefore, couldn't believe the disciples. So, Jesus appears a second time, primarily to **help** Thomas, and not to **scorn** his disbelief. Jesus invites Thomas to examine his wounds. **And**, merely **seeing** Jesus was enough for Thomas. He quickly proclaims his faith, in both the humanity of Jesus - "**My Lord**", and the divinity of Jesus - "**My God**". Thomas, like the disciples eight days earlier, is now also filled with the Holy Spirit.

Now Thomas, was a man who continually searched for the **truth**, and that was why he had difficulty in believing the disciples' story. He openly declared a personal struggle, with his understanding and belief. Nevertheless, Thomas was at least brave and honest enough, to admit he had doubts, and he was prepared to share these doubts, with his fellow disciples. Thomas had a virtuous honesty. He would not say he understood something, when in fact he didn't, or that he believed, when he did not believe. He was not one to suppress his doubts, by pretending they didn't exist. And he was not someone, who would glibly **profess** things those things which he had never thought **out**, or really believed **in**. Thomas needed to satisfy his doubts. However, when he **had** satisfied his doubts, he went the whole way - "**My Lord and my God**". Thomas was not a **half-way** man, when it comes to the matter of faith.

The story of Thomas is very important, because Jesus said: "*You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe*". And this **blessing** is for all those who have **not seen** the physical Jesus, but believe in Him, as their Lord. And today, Jesus is assuring us, that our **faith** is no different from that of his first disciples because our faith, is **also** grounded in the **presence** of the Lord Jesus. The disciples saw Jesus through their eyes, **we** see Jesus through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, is our personal gift from Jesus, that enables us to see him with our hearts. His gift enables us to confirm and strengthen our belief in the Risen Lord. And our belief, in turn, deepens our faith. And faith is a **grace**, a gift from God.

We can study the Scriptures, we can recite the liturgy, and we can sing hymns. But if our heart is not open to the Holy Spirit, then our efforts are in vain. With a closed heart, we can only know **about** Jesus, but with an open heart, we can **know** Jesus. Yes, Thomas wanted to learn and understand, however, his heart was **open** and **responsive**, and that was why Jesus appeared to him. If our hearts are like Thomas's, then we too will see Jesus, in many forms and in many places. And like Thomas, we too can have doubts, some of the time, perhaps most of the time, or even all the time. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit is always there, on hand, to help us through our difficulties. Jesus would never let us struggle on our own, to find him, and see him. Our life, is one, long, faith journey. A journey in which our faith grows at varying paces, increased or hampered, by daily events, but always accompanied by the Holy Spirit. So, I'll leave you with these words "For things of this world look with your eyes, for things of Christ, look with your heart".