

The twelve must have anticipated that something was about to happen. Mary Magdalene told them just this morning that she saw Jesus alive. When John and Peter went to the tomb, Jesus was not there, just his burial cloth lying there like he vanished into thin air or something. This could have been the most important day in the life of Thomas, but he chose not to show up. Scripture doesn't give us the reason for Thomas's absence; it just says that he "was not with them when Jesus came".

But, the focus of this Gospel is not upon Thomas, it is upon Jesus, the one who saves us. All the power of the world had been thrown at Jesus to kill him, but he did not say a word to stop it. Hosts of angels were at his command, yet he chose not to meet violence with violence, but to defeat sin and death with unconditional love. He rose victorious from the tomb, and now the entire world has hope that our lives will not end in death, but in new life with our Father in heaven.

Now Jesus wastes no time in getting on with his plan for our salvation. On that same evening of Easter Sunday, that first day of his resurrection, Jesus goes to see the apostles that he had chosen from the beginning. Through them, he would form a community of believers. And by that community of believers, he would affect the salvation of the entire world. This is the moment that he chose to give his Spirit to the apostles. Just as the breath of God blew over the waters of Genesis creating order out of chaos, just as God blew the breath of life into Adam in the "Garden", so Jesus now breathes on his apostles infusing them with his divine life.

He said to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." Our Catholic tradition looks upon these words as the scriptural basis for the forgiveness of sins through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Thomas picked a really bad day to be absent.

But, Jesus is all about second chances. After all he **is** the second chance for all of humankind. What was lost in the Garden, Jesus has come to restore, and now he comes again on the Second Sunday of Easter to his apostles. This time 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.” (John 20: 26-27)

For Thomas, the words of Jesus must have seemed like having an open mike on the cell phone or something. Jesus wasn't there when he scoffed at the other apostles with his unbelief, but now Jesus invites him to believe using his very words. Thomas must have been red as a beet as he heard the invitation of Jesus. But Jesus didn't have harsh words for him; only an invitation for him to see for himself that this is Jesus, alive and well and standing before him—that he might believe.

The gospel does not say whether or not Thomas actually touched the wounds of Jesus, but he did believe, as he declared Jesus, “My Lord and my God.” Tradition has it that Thomas went on to India to begin the church there, and many people came to the Lord because of him.

You probably noticed that both appearances of Jesus occurred on a Sunday. That is the day that Jesus comes to us here as well. We are here today to worship God because he is God and we love him, but we also come to be that church by which Jesus comes again to give salvation to the entire world. Jesus comes to us today in the words of scripture, in the person of the priest and in the gathering of the assembly; but he comes to us most especially in the Eucharist.

“In one of his sermons on the Eucharist, Ronald Knox made this observation: Throughout two thousand years of history Christians, both whole churches and individual believers, have consistently been able to ignore many of Jesus' key commandments and invitations. We have either been too weak to follow his counsels or we have rationalized them away in some way.

And so, to a large extent, we have exempted ourselves from the demands to love our enemies; to turn the other cheek when attacked; to forgive seventy times seven; to leave our gift at the altar and first go and seek reconciliation with our brother before we worship; to place justice on the same level as worship; to see mercy as more important than dogma; to not commit adultery, not steal, not call someone a fool, not tell lies, not

give in to jealousy. We have, in virtually every one of these areas, individually and collectively, a history of infidelity and rationalization.

But we have, for the most part, been faithful and consistent throughout all the years to one of Jesus' commands, to celebrate the Eucharist, to meet together in every circumstance and share his word and break bread and drink wine in his memory. The older I get, the more meaningful this bald fact becomes to me, both as it pertains to the church and as it applies to me personally. Whenever possible, I try to celebrate Eucharist every day, for many reasons. The Eucharist contains and carries many deep realities: it helps continue the incarnation of God in history; it is God's physical embrace; it is an intensification of our community together as Christians; it is the new manna that God gives to nurture his people; it is our family meal together as believers; it is Christ's sacrifice which we commemorate ritually; it is God's gift of reconciliation and forgiveness; it is an invitation to a deeper discipleship; it is a banquet table opened up for the poor; it is a vigil service within which we wait for Christ to return; and it is Christ's priestly prayer for the world.

But I go to Eucharist daily for another reason as well, a more personal one: this is the one place where I can be faithful, where I can essentially measure up. I can't always control how I feel or how I think, and I can't always measure up morally and spiritually, but inside of my perpetual inadequacy and occasional doubt and confusion, I can be faithful in this one deep way. I can go to the Eucharist regularly.

With age, I am growing less confident or sure about my knowledge of God, religion, and life. As knowledge deepens, it also widens and begins to take on softer edges. Unlike the more confident years of my youth, I now live with the sense that my understanding of God's ways is a long way from being adequate, let alone normative. The mystery we live in is huge, and the more we grasp the magnitude of the cosmic and spiritual world, the more we grasp, too, how ineffable is God. God truly is beyond us, beyond language, beyond imagination, and even beyond feeling. We can know God, but can never understand God. "And so we must be more humble, both in our theology and in our ecclesiology. Mostly we don't know what we are doing. The Eucharist, because it is the one ritual given us by Jesus himself, is one of our places of confidence.

Moreover, the older I get, the more I see how blind I am to my own hypocrisies and how weak and rationalizing is my human nature. I don't always know when I'm rationalizing or biased or following Christ properly. And, even when I do, I don't always have the strength or will to do what I know is right. And so I lean heavily on the invitation that Jesus left us on the night before he died, to break bread and drink wine in his memory and to trust that this, if all else is uncertain, is what I should be doing while I wait for him to return.

Sometimes, when he was instructing a couple for marriage, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great Lutheran priest and martyr, would caution them with words to this effect: Right now you are in love and you believe that your love can sustain your marriage. It can't. But your marriage can sustain your love!

The Eucharist is such a ritual-container for Christians. We can't sustain our faith, charity, forgiveness, and hope on the basis of feeling or thought, but we can sustain them through the Eucharist. We can't always be clear-headed or warm-hearted; we can't always be sure that we know the exact path of God; and we won't always measure up morally and humanly to what faith asks of us. But we can be faithful in this one deep way: we can go to the Eucharist regularly."

Excerpt From: Ronald Rolheiser. "Our One Great Act of Fidelity."

Like Thomas in today's Gospel, a lot depends on our showing up on Sunday, even if we don't feel like it. Jesus is all about second chances. Be sure to be there for yours. Next Sunday may become the most important day of your life.

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