

Over the years I've always felt sorry for the apostle Thomas on this Sunday. Like the late-comedian Rodney Dangerfield, Thomas “gets no respect.” Many the homilies preached criticizing Thomas' disbelief in the report of Jesus' Resurrection and his boldness to make doubly sure he's not seeing a ghost or being hoodwinked by demanding to physically examine Jesus' wounds. All while the preacher and the assembly smugly look on with attitudes of “if I would've been there I would've been like Thomas” comforting themselves with Jesus' beatitude at the end of the Gospel, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.” (Jn. 20: 29). I want to propose another perspective.

A book I recently read contained a chapter titled “The Liturgy of Our Wounds: Temptation, Humility, and Failure”. The author's thesis is that we come to know and enter into relationship with Jesus by the way of wounds—his, and, ours: “For Christians the joyful faith in the Risen One never loses sight of the Crucified One. God in Christ has taken to Himself the brokenness of the human condition. Hence, human woundedness, brokenness, death itself are transformed from dead ends to doorways into Life. In the divinizing humanity of Christ, bruises become balm. ...Ours were the sufferings he bore, ours the sorrows he carried, by his wounds we have been healed” (Isa. 53:4-5). The physical body of Jesus glorified through the resurrection still includes scars, the wounds of his suffering and death-- nail marks in his hands and feet, the open wound from the soldier's spear on his right side. Indeed, Jesus risen is recognized precisely through his wounds. Any portrayal of the Risen Jesus without his wounds betrays the gospel and subsequent church teaching on the mystery of his passion, death, resurrection and glorification. The Risen Jesus is a Wounded Healer.

In inviting Thomas to probe with his finger the marks of the nails in his hands and thrust his hand into the wound in his side leading to his heart, the symbol of Divine Mercy, which we commemorate today, Jesus is inviting Thomas to enter into relationship with him through Thomas' own wounds, his doubts, his fears. In doing so Thomas will come to know divine mercy, forgiveness, and healing, so that now “seeing” not with physical sight but with the eyes of faith he may no longer be “unbelieving but believe” (Jn. 20:28).

Thomas is a model of faith for all of us. Thomas teaches us that we do not have to be “perfect”— without stain, wrinkle or spot for Jesus to love us. Thomas teaches us that our imperfections— sins, failures, shattered dreams—all that is bruised or broken within us—in them the Risen Jesus waits for us in his wounds and offers us the balm of his gift of “Shalom”— mercy, peace, his abiding presence. Jesus, risen from the dead is not far from us— his mercy calling to us in our woundedness through his glorified wounds.

Our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles presents a picture of an idealized early New Testament Church, in which all things were held in common. While such a community may be a utopian dream, the message is of a church in which all the members committed themselves to being agents of God’s love and mercy for each other, especially those in need, the wounded. Our second reading from the first letter of St. John reminds us that we fulfill this commandment through love of God and love of each other. This is the church as a “field hospital” spoken about by Pope Francis in his Apostolic Letter, “The Joy of the Gospel.”

In the scene between Jesus and the Apostle Thomas, Jesus invites Thomas, and by extension us, to get close to him, to reach within his very body. “If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, you must get close to the thing that has them,” wrote spiritual writer C.S. Lewis in his book, *Mere Christianity*. Pope Francis has stated we find the Risen Jesus in his wounds through “doing the works of mercy, in giving to the body” ministering to the physical needs of our wounded brothers and sisters. Mere philanthropy (writing a check) the pope states is not enough. “We must touch the wounds of Jesus, caress them. We must heal the wounds of Jesus with tenderness. We must literally kiss the wounds of Jesus.” The life of St. Francis changed when he embraced the leper because “he touched the living God and lived in adoration.”

What Jesus asks of us in our wounds and in our works of mercy is what Thomas asked: to enter his wounds and so believe.

Fr. Jim Secora