

## Title: ***Peace: The first gift of Christ's Resurrection***

Subtitle: The challenges of faith in the modern age.

The Gospel appointed for today covers two resurrection appearances of our Lord to his disciples. In the first instance, the disciples' emotional state rapidly changes from despair and disillusionment to joy and peace. In the second encounter, our Lord offers irrefutable proof to Thomas, despite his confirmed skepticism. In both cases, Jesus repeats his proclamation of peace, which was more than wishful thinking. It was a genuine spiritual reality based upon the literal and physical evidence of his resurrected state, which has vast implications.

The realization of such a dramatic turnaround is not easily grasped. Thomas was adamantly skeptical and said, "...unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."<sup>1</sup>

Thomas was one of the Twelve, the one called Didymus.<sup>2</sup> That name indicates he was a twin. As most of you know, I am also a twin. As such, I have enjoyed meeting and sharing common emotional dynamics and experiences with other twins. In most cases, due to constant comparisons at an early age, most of us (twins) have felt like we have to work extra hard to establish our own identity. But, in the long run, it has given me the strength to stand alone, even if others don't share my convictions. So as I read between the lines, I can't help but wonder if Thomas' emotional independence gave him the boldness to express his feelings regardless of what others may think. Here is a guy who is not going to pretend. If he has any

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<sup>1</sup> John 20:25

<sup>2</sup> John 20:24

questions, he will raise them; if he has doubts, he will let them be known.

But that same independence was both a strength and a weakness. In this case, it led to his missing the first resurrection appearance. His introverted tendencies that sought solace in solitude made faith in Christ more difficult. Everyone occasionally experiences the highs and lows of faith, but if you are independently inclined like Thomas, it makes recovering from those “lows” even more problematic. Thomas must have been emotionally exhausted and overwhelmed, as any follower of Christ would be when Jesus went from the exuberance of the triumphal entry to the devastation of the cross in the span of a single week. It is in times of such darkness and doubt that we need each other, and for this reason, the writer to the Hebrews admonished, “Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is.”<sup>3</sup> It is a dangerous practice for any Christian to try to live without support from others, especially during times when we might be tempted to lose heart and give up.

Don’t we all have trouble wrapping our minds around Christ’s victory over suffering and death? Don’t we all, at times, struggle with the idea that something good can come from something so obviously evil?

We all want spiritual reality, but most of us don’t arrive at a place of confident trust without honestly asking fundamental questions and lots of them.

Gary Parker writes in his book, *The Gift of Doubt*, “If faith never encounters doubt, if truth never struggles with error, if good never battles with evil, how can faith know its own

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<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 10:25

power?” I like Parker’s comment because it makes our spiritual quest in the face of doubt something relatable and achievable.

As a hospice chaplain, I have had many patients ask me questions such as, “Why has God made it so difficult to see His presence and His plan?” Such questions are difficult to answer.

Ravi Zacharias, a modern-day Christian apologist, helps us to see that “God has put enough into this world to make faith in Him a most reasonable thing. But He has left out enough to make it impossible to live by sheer reason alone. So faith and reason must always work together in that plausible blend.”<sup>4</sup>

Ultimately, we all struggle with tough questions as we face the harsh realities of modern life. That is why Jesus showed Thomas the wounds on his hands and feet. Beholding his wounds tells us something about the mystery of the incarnation, where God allowed himself to be vulnerable enough to suffer in our place. It does not answer why God allows suffering. But it answers a more critical question: that God understands our suffering and is with us and does not leave us alone in our suffering. His wounds demonstrate what suffering cannot be interpreted to mean, namely, that God does not care about the suffering we experience.

Moreover, the wounds in his hands and side gave Thomas irrefutable proof that our Lord overcame the worst this sinful world could inflict. Therefore, when Thomas beheld those wounds, he exclaimed with profound astonishment, “My Lord and My God.” In these five simple words of allegiance, he said, “You are ‘my Lord’ (the one I firmly believe has all authority and is worthy of my obedient allegiance.<sup>5</sup> You are ‘my God,’ who I will devotedly worship. This personal and heartfelt

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<sup>4</sup> Ravi Zacharias, “Why Jesus: Rediscovering His Truth in an Age of Mass-Marketed Spirituality

<sup>5</sup> Definition of “Lord”: Strong’s Concordance, #2962 *kurios*, *supreme* in authority, that is, *controller* or master

commitment results in a blessedness that Jesus declares comes to all “who have not seen me and yet have believed.” Now Thomas could confidently affirm and boldly give witness “to what he had seen with (his) eyes, and touched with his hands.”<sup>6</sup> For now, he knew from personal experience Jesus had indeed risen from the dead.

The words of the inspirational hymn, “Crown Him with Many Crowns,” expresses through the poetic words something of the love and devotion Thomas felt:

Crown him the Lord of love;  
behold his hands and side,  
those wounds, yet visible above,  
in beauty glorified.

All hail, Redeemer, hail!  
For thou hast died for me;  
thy praise and glory shall not fail  
throughout eternity.

Faith like this can see beyond the temporal sufferings of this world a victory that has been won. It is the faith that our New Testament lesson says is blessed, “for by his great mercy we have received a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”<sup>7</sup> In this faith, “we rejoice, even if now, for a little while, we have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”<sup>8</sup> This blessedness resounds in rousing acclamations of praise: Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

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<sup>6</sup> 1 John 1:1

<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter 1:3

<sup>8</sup> 1 Peter 1:6