



# LIVING THE GOSPEL



**Divine Mercy Sunday**  
**April 7, 2024**

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**Theme: "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."**

## **Gathering Prayer**

**All:** God of everlasting mercy, who in the very recurrence of the paschal feast kindle the faith of the people you have made your own, increase, we pray, the grace you have bestowed, that all may grasp and rightly understand in what font they have been washed, by whose Spirit they have been reborn, by whose Blood they have been redeemed. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **Exploring the Word**

### **Gospel Reading: John 20:19-31**

<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." <sup>22</sup> And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."

<sup>26</sup> Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing."

<sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

## **Gospel Focus**

The last paragraph of this gospel passage is a little frustrating. Why would John not write down all the signs that Jesus did? It seems like more preservation of this story would be better? But the incompleteness of John's retelling reveals an important thing: we need each other. None of us holds the complete story of Jesus, but we all see him in different ways according to our various places in life. When we come together to share what we have seen of Jesus, we may begin to realize that he far surpasses our hopes for him. Our images of Jesus are always too small. Thomas, too, would have understood more of Christ had he trusted those who had experienced him differently.

## **Gospel Reflection**

At a gathering, there's always someone who is willing to speak up when everybody else may be wondering the same thing but is afraid to ask. In today's gospel, it is Thomas who voices the doubts and fears with which others are also struggling. The Fourth Evangelist frequently uses one character as a representative figure. In today's gospel, Thomas stands for everyone who is a follower of Jesus yet harbors doubts.

In the first scene, the disciples are together, locked in fear, when Jesus stands in their midst. His double declaration, "Peace be with you," recalls his promise of peace that casts out fear (14:27). Jesus then shows the disciples his hands and side, the ineradicable evidence of the brutality inflicted on him. Oddly enough, instead of increasing their terror, this gesture causes them to rejoice. The explanation is found in the Last Supper scene, where Jesus spoke to his disciples about his impending death, likening his pain and theirs to the labor pangs of a woman giving birth, whose agony turns to joy after the new life is brought forth. Jesus has assured them that when they would see him again, their hearts would rejoice with a joy no one could take from them (16:20-22).

Jesus then sends the disciples to continue the mission for which the Father sent him. In John's Gospel there is no calling or sending of the Twelve, the mission is entrusted to all disciples here, as they are empowered with the Spirit. As Jesus breathes on them, the new life brought forth through his death and resurrection vivifies them. The image is reminiscent of the creation of the first human being, into whose nostrils the Creator breathes the breath of life (Gen2:7). It also calls to mind Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones, over which he prophesies, "I will make breath enter you so you may come to life" (Ezek 37:5). Just as God restored hope to the disheartened Babylonian exiles, so the risen Christ breathes peace and joy into fearful disciples.

The power that the disciples receive with this infusion of the Spirit is the ability to heal and forgive. When Jesus shows his wounds, we see that forgiveness does not erase them, nor does it dismiss them as unimportant. Telling the truth about them is essential for forgiveness and healing.

In the second scene, Thomas stands for all who were not present in the initial experience with the resurrected Christ. Just as Mary Magdalene did, so the disciples declare, "We have seen the Lord" (20:17, 25). But belief on the basis of another's word is not sufficient (see 4:42); one must have firsthand experience of Christ in order to participate in the mission. Jesus once again stands in their midst, bringing peace. He directs Thomas to probe the meaning of his wounds so that he too can be an agent of forgiveness and healing. When Thomas makes his acclamation of faith, Jesus affirms that there are two ways of blessedness: believing by having seen, and believing without having seen. The crucial thing is to believe, so as to have life.

## **Old/New Testament and CCC links**

### **First Reading — Acts 4:32-35**

<sup>32</sup> Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. <sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold <sup>35</sup> and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need.

## **Responsorial Psalm — Ps 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24**

**(R): Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.**

Let the house of Israel say, "His mercy endures forever." Let the house of Aaron say, "His mercy endures forever." Let those who fear the Lord say, "His mercy endures forever." **(R)**

I was hard pressed and was falling, but the Lord helped me. My strength and my courage is the Lord, and he has been my savior. The joyful shout of victory in the tents of the just. **(R)**

The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it. **(R)**

## **Second Reading — 1 John 5:1-6**

<sup>1</sup> Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God, and every one who loves the parent loves the child. <sup>2</sup> By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. <sup>3</sup> For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. <sup>4</sup> For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. <sup>5</sup> Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? <sup>6</sup> This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood.

## **Catechism of The Catholic Church**

**105.** *God is the author of Sacred Scripture.* "The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of Sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."(DV 11)

"For Holy Mother Church, relying on the faith of the apostolic age, accepts as sacred and canonical the books of the Old and the New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts, on the grounds that, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author, and have been handed on as such to the Church herself."(DV 11; cf. Jn 20:31; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pt 1:19-21; 3:15-16)

**514.** Many things about Jesus of interest to human curiosity do not figure in the Gospels. Almost nothing is said about his hidden life at Nazareth, and even a great part of his public life is not recounted.(Cf. Jn 20:30) What is written in the Gospels was set down there "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."(Jn 20:31)

**643.** Given all these testimonies, Christ's Resurrection cannot be interpreted as something outside the physical order, and it is impossible not to acknowledge it as an historical fact. It is clear from the facts that the disciples' faith was drastically put to the test by their master's Passion and death on the cross, which he had foretold.(Cf. Lk 22:31-32) The shock provoked by the Passion was so great that at least some of the disciples did not at once believe in the news of the Resurrection. Far from showing us a community seized by a mystical exaltation, the Gospels present us with disciples demoralized ("looking sad"(1 Lk 24:17; cf. Jn 20:19)) and frightened. For they had not believed the holy women returning from the tomb and had regarded their words as an "idle tale".(Lk 24:11; cf. Mk 16:11, 13) When Jesus reveals himself to the Eleven on Easter evening, "he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen."(Mk 16:14)

**644.** Even when faced with the reality of the risen Jesus the disciples are still doubtful, so impossible did the thing seem: they thought they were seeing a ghost. "In their joy they were still disbelieving and still wondering."(Lk 24:38-41) Thomas will also experience the test of doubt and St. Matthew relates that during the risen Lord's last appearance in Galilee "some doubted."(Cf Jn 20:24-27; Mt 28:17) Therefore the hypothesis that the Resurrection was produced by the apostles' faith (or credulity) will not hold up. On the contrary their faith in the Resurrection was born, under the action of divine grace, from their direct experience of the reality of the risen Jesus.

**730.** At last Jesus' hour arrives(Cf. Jn 13:1; 17:1) he commends his spirit into the Father's hands(Cf. Lk 23:46; Jn 19:30) at the very moment when by his death he conquers death, so that, "raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,"(Rom 6:4) he might immediately *give* the Holy Spirit by "breathing" on his disciples.(Cf. Jn 20:22) From this hour onward, the mission of Christ and the Spirit becomes the mission of the Church: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."(Jn 20:21; cf. Mt 28:19; Lk 24:47-48; Acts 1:8)

## **Sharing and Discussion**

1. Thomas' response is not unique. How do you determine what is the truth?
2. Verse 31 says, "but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." Has the word of God made a difference for you? How?
3. The first reading reveals an early church that holds all things in common. Shaped by capitalism and consumerism, it is hard for some to envision living in such a way, but what is one way you could loosen your grasp of possessions and share with those who are in need?

## **Closing Prayer**

**All:** Compassionate God, your resurrected Son appeared to the disciples with his wounds from the cross on full display. Hear our prayers and embrace our wounds with your healing power so that we too might experience the joy of resurrection. We offer this prayer through Christ our risen Lord. Amen.

**Leader:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

**All:** Amen