

## Second Sunday of Easter – John 20:19-31

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### **Introduction: From Fear to Joy. Doubt to Belief**

On this Divine Mercy Sunday, this reading from the Gospel of John is proclaimed on the Second Sunday of Easter in each of the lectionary cycles. This fact all alone should alert us to the significance of the encounters with the Risen Jesus that are described in this passage. This Gospel combines two scenes: Jesus' appearance to his disciples huddled in fear in a room and Jesus' dialogue with Thomas, the disciple who doubted.

What is stunning is that this Sunday's Gospel begins in an atmosphere of fear – right after the sheer joy of Easter Resurrection. The disciples are inside a room—with the doors firmly locked—because they are terrified that, as companions of Jesus, they too might be arrested and punished. Suddenly, there is Jesus standing in their midst – present in a new way. “Peace be with you!” is his greeting – the traditional Jewish greeting of “Shalom.”

Amazingly and mercifully, there is no critical word of their failure to stand by him in his final moments. All is forgotten. Forgiven. Mercy is given. The disciples' fear is gradually transformed into an unspeakable joy at the return of their Master. He then launches them into the same mission that the Father gave him for the sake of the world, by breathing on them. It is interesting that the opening words of both the book of Genesis and John's Gospel speak of a new beginning. It is clear here that God is breathing on them – creating them anew. “As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.” They are on a new mission, and their lives will never be the same. They will create new communities.

The scene changes in this Gospel passage with Jesus appearing once again a week later – with Thomas present. When the disciples told him that they had seen the Lord, he refused to believe. Then Jesus invites Thomas to place his fingers in his wounds and to believe. In response, he gives one of the most powerful professions of Jesus' identity than anyone else in the Gospel: “My Lord and my God!” For the disciples, fear to joy; for Thomas, doubt to belief. Isn't this the meaning of Easter for us today?

This Gospel passage concludes with Jesus' words: “Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.” This intriguing statement is clearly aimed at the second or third generation Christians in the time of this Gospel's composition—but also aimed at us in 2021—so many generations after Jesus. And the question hangs in the air: Do we believe or not?

I would invite you to take time to read and ponder the words from the Gospel of John 20:19-31.

What word or words caught your attention?

What in this passage comforted you?

What in this passage challenged you?

### **Further Questions and Reflections:**

Jesus breathed on them. Ask him to breathe on you. What might that mean for you? A new inner spirit? “The doors were locked . . .” What keeps you from throwing open the doors so you can live with full integrity and freedom? Whom have I locked out of my life because of fear? The Church Fathers centuries ago spoke of “two Thomas’s.” (Remember: Thomas was called Didymus – which means “twin.”) They posed a challenging question that resonates to us today. Within each one of us there are two Thomas’s: The Thomas of doubt and unbelief, and the Thomas of trust and belief. Both Thomas’s are struggling within each of us most of the time. And the question?: Which Thomas controls our life? Our relationship with others? Our relationship with Christ?

Sending is what God likes to do. Jesus is sent. The Holy Spirit is sent. And we are sent too. Listen. Where are you being sent? Do you see a mission? Thomas’ words, “My Lord and my God!” express an intimacy, a friendship, a relationship. How would you describe your own relationship with Jesus?

*Deacon David*

Deacon David Suley  
St. Patrick Catholic Church  
Rockville, Maryland

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