



Things to Ponder

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Reflections – Second Sunday of Easter/Divine Mercy Sunday

Good morning Everyone:

Today, we celebrate the Second Sunday of Easter and Divine Mercy Sunday. What a beautiful liturgical combination! Our reflections will center on John's Gospel: Chapter 20, Verses 19-31. Today, read, ponder, and pray with this very familiar Gospel passage that tells the story of Thomas and his doubts that the Lord is risen. Maybe he reminds us of ourselves especially in these difficult and dark times of the pandemic?

Before my reflections on this passage, I would like to share something extraordinary that I experienced on Friday. I am on call at Gate of Heaven Cemetery for any gravesite services where they need a deacon to officiate, especially for those who have died due to the Coronavirus. That morning, I was called to officiate for a young man (30's?) who had died due to the Coronavirus. The whole scene at the grave site was so surreal.

The cemetery crew was all dressed up in white hazard suits with protective hoods and gloves. The funeral director, cemetery director, and myself wore masks and gloves; and all kept a safe distance from each other. The saddest thing? Since the person died of the Coronavirus, NO family members at all were allowed to attend the burial of their loved one! The cemetery's front iron gates were locked for all public entrance - high security and safeguards.

It is within this surreal situation that I recited the beautiful prayers from the Order of Catholic Burials; gave this young man his final blessing with holy water; celebrated his life, and bade him farewell as he entered into God's eternal home.

It was such an overwhelming, emotional and spiritual experience for me. Here I was within this locked down cemetery, with no family members, staring in the face of a man who had succumbed to the pandemic, and proclaiming that Jesus is Risen. Risen indeed! And life is the final victor! I shall never, ever forget this unique event of Easter - an experience that I will hold deep in my heart for a very long time. It shook me to my core. But I felt the Lord's presence there in that locked down cemetery, with dark clouds billowing over us, and a glimmer of light far in the distance.

Some reflections on today's Gospel passage:

In this passage, John mentions several times that the doors were locked for the disciples were huddled together in fear. They were in a quarantine! Their experience centuries ago, reminds us where we are today. Some questions we may ask ourselves:

What fears keep me from living my faith more fully?
Whom have I locked out of my life because of fear?
Will I have the courage to open some doors during this pandemic time?
What's keeping me from throwing open the doors so I can live with full integrity, authenticity, and freedom, and be the person God calls me to be?

In this Gospel, this short story builds to the climax of Thomas's words:

"My Lord, and my God!" I was struck by the adjective, "my." The words express an intimacy, a friendship, perhaps a kinship. There is a personal relationship here between Thomas and Jesus.

One question for us:

What is my relationship with this Jesus who is now risen? - A friend? Someone I can relate to? Talk to with real words? Is he for real?

The Church Fathers way back in the early centuries spoke of "two Thomas's." (Remember, Thomas was called Didymus which means twin.) The Church Fathers posed the challenging question centuries ago to the Early Church that resonates all the way to us in 2020:

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, especially in these difficult times of isolation, disconnection, and fear.

The question is raised for us: Which Thomas controls our life? Our relationship with others? Our relationship with Christ?

There is so much to ponder in this very familiar story. I would invite you to reflect on the above reflections and questions, and perhaps the Spirit of this Risen Christ will lead you to other thoughts and questions.

Enjoy your Easter ride. A journey of hope. A journey of coming out from dark tombs. A journey of believing in a God who leads us forth into light and safety. This we believe.

Deacon David

"Hope does not disappoint!" (Romans 5:5)

St. Patrick Catholic Church
Rockville
Maryland

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