

## 2 EASTER MAY 1, 2011 CYCLE "A"

**TITLE: I SEE YOUR HANDS AND YOUR SIDE.  
YOU ARE MY LORD AND MY GOD.**

**READINGS: Acts 2:14a,22-32, Ps.16, 1Pet.1:3-9, John 20:19-31**

Today is the first Sunday after Easter also known as 2Easter also known as Low Sunday. They probably call it Low Sunday because the number of visitors and church members who haven't attended since last Christmas are now missing. But this time of the church year is so rich! The whole emphasis at this Easter time is an emphasis on responding and witnessing in faith to the Easter event we just celebrated. The impact of the resurrection brings about a remarkable period of signs and wonders for the early church.

The person which is spot-lighted by the church today is Thomas who is called "doubting" because of the story we heard in today's Gospel reading. Yes, poor doubting Thomas. He is the only one of the twelve Apostles with an adjective permanently attached to his name. But Thomas exhibits so much more than doubt. He was one of Jesus' most devoted followers. It was in John 11:16 that we see the willingness of Thomas to go with Jesus into danger and even to die with him. "Let us also go, that we may die with him," says Thomas when Jesus had to return to Judea where the Pharisees were preparing to kill him. He held Jesus in the very highest esteem. He saw him as the Messiah, who had come to save Israel and he was willing to follow him anywhere, fight for him and even die so that the Kingdom of Israel would be restored. It is a little later in John 14, that Jesus is teaching his followers about the life to come, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places...I am going before you to prepare a place for you...You know the way to the place where I m going." And it is our "daring" Thomas, our "thoughtful" Thomas who inquires, "Lord we do not know where you are going, how can we know the way?" And Jesus replies, "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me." Thomas is bold enough, inquisitive enough to ask meaningful questions to help understand and establish an even more secure and permanent bond with Jesus.

But suddenly we see Thomas crushed. He is terribly let down, totally disillusioned. How could his Messiah end up being crucified, put to death? Jesus should have been crowned with gold, not crowned with thorns. Had Jesus deceived

him, sold him a bill of goods? Was it all simply a hoax, untrue, all for nothing? Like us, Thomas was filled with human emotions and reactions, doubt, disappointment, disillusionment, because his Master had totally crushed his hopes and expectations. And now the other disciples were telling him that Jesus was raised from the dead. How could that be? What kind of line are they trying to feed me now? It is perfectly understandable for Thomas to react the way he did. Wouldn't we? Haven't we when we have experienced doubt and disillusionment in our own lives?

But Thomas wasn't the only one. All of the disciples were disappointed, disillusioned, dejected. If Thomas was slower to accept the resurrection than the others, I like to think it was because she was more intense in his devotion and commitment than the others. Remember he was willing to die for Jesus. Peter had denied Christ. Judas had betrayed him. But Thomas was willing to die for him. If his expectations had been higher, then perhaps his doubt and disappointment was also more intense. He simply did not realize then that Christ's suffering and death had been a necessary part of God's plan.

But Thomas didn't drop out of the fellowship. This is so important. Thomas was there with the other disciples when they met together after Jesus' resurrection. He could have made excuses. He could have stayed home and wrapped himself in gloom and despair. But he didn't he was there when Jesus came again and invited him to, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Jn.20:27. It is then that the "believing Thomas" professes his faith, "My Lord and my God."

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we were able to make the same total commitment as Thomas? But what happens so often is that people go through a difficult time when they feel God has let them down and the first thing they do is drop out of the fellowship. They miss one Sunday, then a second, and before very long, going to church takes far more effort than staying home. And it is so easy to hold the pastor responsible especially if a remark or statement is taken in the wrong way or given a negative connotation. But just because you don't like the baker doesn't mean you stop eating bread. Church is where the people are who care about you, who love you with Christ's love. Thomas didn't stop going to fellowship and it was in that fellowship of faith that the risen Christ appeared to him.

"My Lord and my God," professed Thomas and he went on to become a great Christian missionary leader. My guess is that his time of disillusionment and doubt

actually left him stronger than he was before. It happens more often than you can imagine. People go through a time of testing and they come out better rather than bitter. In their time of need they feel the comforting presence of Christ, and something wonderful happens in their life. In their hearts they cry out, “My Lord and my God!” and the darkness that has enveloped them becomes as bright as day.

Maintain your connection to the body of Christ, to the fellowship of the saints. Let the people in the church love you and pray for you. Maintain an openness to the comforting and healing power of the Holy Spirit. Give Christ a chance to come to you and show you his hands and his side for he has been where you are. He wants to help you, like Thomas, to move from being full of doubt and disillusionment to being dynamic and full of Christ. Don't give up. Trust in the risen Christ and your Christian friends and you will endure. Listen to Peter's encouraging words in today's reading from his first letter: “Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” **Amen.**

**Pastor Barney**