

2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER ESSENDON 2021
HONEST THOMAS & ONGOING MISSION
Jn 20.19-31 AA 4.32-45 1Jn 5.1-6
(Rhyme Bible for Sunday Masses – “Good News”)

Mark’s Gospel’s original ending, with the women at the tomb at first running off in fear and uncertainty, leaves it to us, to take the step forward in faith, to realize and accept his ongoing presence in our lives and our world to this day. Now, today, we have the original ending to John’s Gospel, where the age-old story of Doubting Thomas, whom I call Honest Thomas (*given that he’s not afraid to express his doubts and seek further explanation of what’s going on!*), is highlighted. Remember his question at the Last Supper (*where he asks the question the others are afraid to ask! Where is Jesus going, and so where to from here, for his followers?*).

To my mind, his experience comes to all of us, in our more difficult moments, which could be described by some spiritual authors as **“dark nights of the soul”**, something which Mother Teresa, the saint of Calcutta, wrote in a heartfelt way, when she was feeling lost and seeking God’s presence, in the moments of her depression and anxiety, something which she responded to by getting into action with serving the most needy she saw in Indian society at the time.

Jose Pagola speaks of the experience of the risen Jesus as a gift. The stories say repeatedly that it is Jesus who takes the initiative in their encounters: *“It is he who comes to them full of life, pulling them out of their confusion and incredulity. The disciples are taken by surprise when Jesus lets himself be seen in the midst of that group of fearful men. Mary Magdalen is looking for a cadaver when Jesus calls to her. No-one is expecting the risen Jesus. It is he who becomes present in their lives beyond all their expectation. That is a ‘grace’ of God, as Paul puts it.”*

Paul’s own self-described experience is an unexpected surprise, whether or not he was struck blind and fell off his horse on the road to Damascus! Whatever happened to him, it was a striking moment of coming to a spiritual encounter with Jesus and an irreversible move to faith in him, continuing on with the same enthusiasm and passion for influencing others, but now in terms of proclaiming the Christian message with conviction, much as he’d been persecuting the early Christians before this transformative moment.

If we are honest with ourselves, we can all be a lot like Thomas at times, particularly as we are material beings, naturally seeking empirical proof of **how** things work which is the function of science, to increase our knowledge of the natural world around us. At the same time, we seek meaning as to **why** we are here and the purpose of life, which is where the question of faith comes in, reflecting the spiritual dimension, inherent in each of us, as we pursue life in a positive, enthusiastic and meaningful way. The Jesus message and experiences of life challenge us to make a choice about accepting faith and so living our lives in the light of his words and example in action, sharing his love and giving of ourselves. No-one can truthfully say that’s not a good idea, as a way to live!

Moreover, Pagola points to the realization of failure in the apostles, who are gathered in fear and doubt here, back together in the sealed-off room, for protection. Jesus’ first words are a greeting of peace, as they gradually move from fear to faith to joy, and so to a realization that they had to move forward into the outside world, in order to fulfil the mission Jesus gives them, and so you and me, here and now. Pagola reflects on their initial sadness, based on guilt for letting Jesus down, and disappearing into the shadows of darkness, but there is no condemnation from the risen Jesus, but rather words of encouragement and affirmation, with a sense of forgiveness and acceptance for who they are, warts and all. As he puts it once again: *“The risen one gives them the gift of God’s peace and blessing; the disciples feel forgiven and accepted again into communion with him. He is still the same Jesus. He is giving them the same peace that he gave to the sick and to sinners when he walked with them in Galilee. That is also the great gift God offers to all his sons and daughters through he dead and risen Christ: forgiveness, peace and resurrection.”*

As scripture scholar Frank Molony SDB puts it: *“The Church will spring into life – not because of the virtue of the disciples or even of that women – but because of the action of God. As we celebrate the joys of Easter, we recognize what God has done through a gift which brings back to life that which is dead: his crucified Son is alive and his failing followers have been restored to discipleship. The living self-gift of Jesus is life-giving.”*

But, we, as his followers then and now, are sent to be messengers of Good News, in the way we respond to the Gospel, giving of ourselves as agents of love and forgiveness, reflecting his Spirit in the way we live our lives.

And so we move from the darkness, fear and doubt, to Easter light, joy and faith, as we see Thomas taking the leap forward into faith in the Risen Jesus, with his affirmation “*My Lord and my God*”, Jesus who enthuses them all with the Spirit, which we celebrate at Pentecost, but which Spirit is present from their initial post-Resurrection experience of his enduring presence.

May his enduring presence, peace, and joy be with us all!

john hannon

11th April 2021