



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

2nd Sunday of Easter, Year C – Divine Mercy Sunday

My Lord and My God

Readings: Acts 5: 12-16, Ps 117, Ap 1: 9-13, 17-19, John 20: 19-31

I always think that is grossly unfair that Thomas should be remembered in Christian history by the simple dismissive description, 'DOUBTING'.

This, let us recall, is the one Apostle who, when Jesus was setting out for Jerusalem and great danger, was prepared to go with Him. (JN. 11)

While his colleagues were shuffling nervously and hesitating about the whole project, Thomas stepped forward and encouraged the others.

'Let us go with Him and die with Him'.

Later on it is Thomas who, puzzled by Jesus' talk of the future puts the great question to Jesus: 'Where are you going? How can we know the way and follow you?'

After the Resurrection and the beginning of the mission of the Church it is Thomas who goes to the far distant Jewish diaspora in Kerala in India and dares to take the Gospel to the dangerous and unsympathetic empire of the Parthians.

He is one tough cookie and no slouch in the courage department.

So, when we talk of doubting Thomas, we are not talking about the dreary intellectual gymnastics that occupied many of my generation who wore their theological doubts like a badge of honour.

The doubts that Thomas had were not that he could not accept Jesus as Lord. They were not doubts that withdrew him from the frontline. They were not doubts that meant he exempted himself from the life of the worshipping community and became a critic of the Jesus movement. Those are modern ideas of doubt.

Thomas could not believe the wonderful news of the Resurrection because it was too much of a miracle to hope for. He was a practical man. He found it difficult because he, the one who had always promised to be there, was absent at the vital moment. He struggled with the evidence of his fellow Apostles because, like a lot of men, he is very down to earth and believes what he can see and touch and hold and comprehend **physically**. To put it simply, he is happier with Lego than with love poetry.

In short, Thomas exhibits archetypal male spirituality and his experience and Jesus' response to him are educative for our mission and ministry to men. This is highly significant because, in our lifetime, the greatest disappearance from the declining Church in Europe is Christian men. Ask any young woman who is looking for a Christian husband.

In other monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam, men are both essential and determinative. The presentation of those faiths is both accessible and attractive to men. Something has happened in the presentation of Christianity in our culture that has led to first doubt and then departure of men.

Thomas wants facts not feelings. He wants evidence not emotions. And he wants it first hand.

Faith, of course, is 'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen', as the Letter to the Hebrews tells us. But that is not to say it is fact free zone, a gooey pit of improbable and comforting fantasies.

Christianity is not myth. It is firmly based in historical event to which the Church bears permanent and eternal witness. We need regularly and persistently to proclaim these facts But it is also something more because those facts require a response.

Faith is a relationship. It is an acknowledgement of the truth of Christ and a personal response and commitment to Him. This has nothing to do with the fuzzy emotional ersatz that has displaced real love and commitment in popular culture.

So what do we do with Thomas? He is a man's man. He is brave. He is exactly the sort of Apostle we need but he needs convincing.

First notice that Thomas did not witness the Risen Lord first time because HE WAS NOT THERE.

Several months ago a young agnostic man asked me how do you get faith? It's a gift – but you can ask for it and put yourself in the way of receiving it.

I asked him how he got Radio I. He was puzzled. I explained.

You get a radio. You plug it in to the power. You turn it on. You tune it in. It does not just emerge from the ether unbidden into your ear.

Being at worship is important. Being in the community of believers, seeking God, dwelling in His Presence is critical.

Of course we have a vital role to play. If someone walks into this church will they have the slightest idea from our focus and demeanour that something huge is happening here? Holy Week and Easter here were remarked on by a visiting friend as being just that kind of witness, you will be pleased to hear.

Second. Thomas needs witnesses to tell him the facts. Never be shy to evangelise the facts of the Faith. So many people have no idea what they are – even people in church. Constant catechesis, learning our faith and proclaiming it.

Third. Thomas encounters the Risen Lord. Now we cannot arrange that, though Mass and exposition provide the opportunities. But Thomas is invited by Jesus to enter His wounded but glorified Body. He comes to understand the challenge.

It is enough. Thomas kneels and proclaims simply 'My Lord and My God.' What has undone Thomas as a doubter and made him as a courageous believer is the encounter – coming as it does on top of the witness, the facts and the conviction of his friends. Authenticity and conviction are the two key words in our witness. Children are very good at spotting these and we men, being, very often, rather and simple large children, respond to these tell- tale signs of truth.

Thomas can now become emotional in the proper sense as he is now able to give himself utterly to Christ and champion the Gospel to the hostile borders of the known world and even to martyrdom.

Modern men do not lack courage but they often do not know how to show it and for what cause. Men need to be challenged by the Gospel, only then will they kneel, confess and follow the Crucified and Risen Lord.