



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

2nd Sunday of Easter-Year A-April 19<sup>th</sup> 2020

***Readings: Acts 2: 42-47, Psalm 117, 1 Peter 1: 3-9,  
John 20: 19-31***

It always seems to me to be grossly unfair that St. Thomas has laboured under the demeaning soubriquet, ‘Doubting’.

As the whole business, on which we are engaged, is ‘faith’, to be labelled a famous doubter seems to be a permanent handicap in being taken seriously. Of course, in our lifetime, Thomas has found some public respite as it has become very fashionable to doubt. People who do not express their doubts are often thought to be ‘unrealistic’, ‘hiding something’ or ‘hopeless fundamentalists’. A not inconsiderable number of famous clergy made their names, from the 60s onward, by writing at great (and well paid) length about their doubts – many of which, from Don Cupitt to Richard Holloway, were indistinguishable from atheism. But Thomas is not of their ilk, not a comfortable inhabiter of the minor realms of academe, a pin-up of the chattering classes or a go-to heretical commentator for the Faith- detesting BBC. Indeed, Thomas is not really a doubter at all (*pace* John’s account) in those terms.

I have met Thomas many times in my ministry. He is a down to earth Man’s man. There is a certain kind of male spirituality that is uncomfortable with the intangible. Unless something is the equivalent of

Lego or Meccano – i.e. you can see it, touch it, make it fit together – it is foreign territory.

I recall years ago being invited to a faithful woman parishioner's home to have dinner with her and her husband – a leading cardio-thoracic surgeon. He was not unsympathetic to the Faith – he just didn't get it. When the ladies had withdrawn, we spent a happy port-fuelled hour trying to grasp the concept of a reality that wasn't quantifiable or measureable or open to physical dissection. Love, though he was in love with his wife, was just such an elusive mystery.

Thomas is not unusual in this matter.

First of all, he is out when Jesus appears to the others. Note this because they are all, we are told by John, in self-imposed lockdown because they are terrified of the authority's possible crackdown on followers of the dead Rabbi and the civil unrest that could be brewing. Thomas is out. In other words, he is the one out on the street, braving the risks, keeping them connected – (perhaps even doing the shopping!).

And this, you will recall, is not the first time we see Thomas the fearless – or at least Thomas the Brave - for fearlessness is not necessarily the mark of bravery. It may just be foolishness. Bravery is being afraid but doing it anyway.

Wind back a little to the Fifth Sunday in Lent – the Raising of Lazarus. Jesus goes there in spite of the potential risk and danger to His life, as the disciples are quick to remind Him. It's not long since the enemy tried to stone Him. By returning to dangerous territory, Jesus is risking His life (and, one suspects more pertinently, theirs). Listen to the next voice in the debate over safety and duty and compassion.

'Let us go then and die with Him.'

The speaker – you guessed it – Thomas.

Thomas the brave.

Thomas the bloke who you would want on your side in a scrap.

Thomas the man who will go where duty calls – no equivocation, no

namby-pambying around.

Thomas the man who will put in the hard yards.

So when he returns to the house only to be told that Jesus had deigned to show up in his absence to this quivering bunch of disciples, he is understandably, to put it mildly, disappointed. And off on one he goes.

‘Unless I can see and touch and feel etc etc. Give me practical proof. I can’t deal with your verbals and your intangibles.’

So, when Jesus next appears, He goes straight to good old faithful tough and tough-talking Thomas.

‘Touch me. I’m real. Put your hand in the wounds. Do not doubt. Believe.’

Thomas’ response is typically robust.

‘My Lord and my God.’

Familiar with the text, we rather take this response for granted but think, for a moment, just how extreme a claim this is for the Faith and what an extravagant self-revelation by the Apostle of his inmost heart.

This was the heart for Jesus that was to take Thomas to the Malabar coast and the cities of Kerala to preach the Gospel and, twenty years on, be martyred there

He will have had plenty of opportunity to share his encounter with the Risen Lord and tell his converts the very words of Jesus,

‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.’

That, brothers and sisters, is most of us. What we learn from Thomas is that we can depend upon the Apostolic witness to the Risen Lord.

It was then and is now the testimony that is at the beating heart of the Church and the engine of the mission of Jesus Christ – My Lord and My God.