



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter-Year C-April 24<sup>th</sup> 2022

***Readings: Acts 5: 12-16, Psalm 117, Apocalypse 1: 9-13, 17-19,  
John 20: 19-31***

As most of you know, I have just returned from pilgrimage. The pilgrimage was to Lourdes and the, as for the last seven years, excluding Covid, with Hosanna Children's Pilgrimage – caring for disabled and disadvantaged youngsters. Because of the fear of this wretched man-made plague only a tenth of the usual number went and we were the first to be welcomed back to a bereft Lourdes. And what a welcome we had. Our group was determined to go – one of the few- and take our children and the prayers of our people to the shrine of 'Ladytown' as I call it . Half of this west country group, 141, is comprised of young helpers from this parish and our parish families and it is my privilege to serve as their chaplain for the week. We have had a fantastic week and I could not be prouder of our team. Their commitment was exemplary, their care constant and unflinching and their maturity and faith humbling. Our motto is 'One for All' and our watchword 'Pray Hard. Play Hard.' It is a week filled with the most serious intention, the most joyful liturgy, the most solemn devotion, the most profound conversation and the sound of joyful laughter in one long street party of the Risen Lord. Sleep? You

can sleep when you're dead. Lourdes echoes to the songs of praise and that echo can be heard in our hearts for the rest of the year.

Whether it's the focus on the Resurrection at daily Mass or the snowball fight in the mountains, the solemnity of the Blessed Sacrament Procession or the glorious singalongs in the local cafes, the torchlight procession and the witness of thousands of lights enveloping Our Lady or the late night deep prayers at the cleft in the rock where St Bernadette was called, the common meal table or the quiet bearing of one another's burdens, from the houses of healing in the confessionals to the wondrous healing Mass in the ancient church of St Savin, from the off duty beer and soul exchanges in the late night cafes, all is redolent of the glory of God, all bears witness to this extraordinary family of Faith, all gives us a little foretaste of that Heaven where we will be always in the Presence and know as we are known and love as we are loved.

Each one of us knew that, though we were tested for the possibility of that evil viral concoction that has disfigured our society and made us nervous of the normal intimacies and destructive of the bonds that hold us together, each knew that this week could not be lived six feet apart and in a gas mask. The intimacies of care and affirmation trump the fear and alienation of our times.

Today's Gospel is a key text on that intimacy of relation, the power of touch. St Thomas, in today's Gospel, is usually pilloried for being a doubter. People forget that he was the brave one that was willing to go and die with Jesus. They forget that he is only asking for that touch which brings reassurance of the Presence, whether it is of Christ or our fellow pilgrims. We may, in the light of history, look down on Thomas' need for proof of that reality and the triumph of the divine life over the forces of darkness and death. But I doubt it. We long for the same

invitation to touch and see and, with Thomas, declare, 'My Lord and my God'.

On pilgrimage we are consciously moving ourselves closer to the Risen One, taking up our place in the company of the saints, asking the questions that trouble us, carrying each others prayers and longing hearts in our hearts. Sharing the secrets of our story and the story of salvation.

Jesus shows Thomas what he longs to see and invites him to touch His wounds. We notice that the hands and feet and side of the Risen Lord bear the wounds. Every representation of the Risen Christ bears these marks. They are real because they are part of the story, part of the history that transforms the destiny of Man. They are not magicked away. When they heal they will be 'those glorious scars' – memories of the cost of God's love. Our sins are forgiven but they are not so much forgotten as transformed by the love of God shown on the Cross. We are wounded people and we come to lay our wounds in the wounds of Christ that our otherwise dark, dismal destiny may be transfigured by His Risen life and, in their turn, as we reach out to touch those pierced hands, our hands may become those of the wounded healer and bring Christ, My Lord and My God to others.

This last week I have been blessed to be among the children of joy – who unembarrassedly reach out to one another and to God, in love and trust. Who, like us and like Thomas, seek the reassurance of the reality of God's love in touch and embrace. Who speak the truth of what is on their minds and hearts and tell us what they see in the world and in us. It is a gift that all too often eludes us supposedly 'fully abled' people and, if it is a social and spiritual handicap, it is one we would do well to embrace, becoming like little children, if we are to make the journey home in the company of Jesus

