

Today is the Sunday after Easter, commonly referred to as Low Sunday after all the festivities of last week. It's also a day when we get to hear about St. Thomas. He seems to come up in the readings every week after Easter, doubting Thomas as he's come to be known throughout church history. But the first question that I think of when I think of Thomas isn't that he doubted. I just wonder where he was when the resurrection happened. Had he popped out? Perhaps the disciples were hungry, and he'd been identified as the one to get out and go and get some pizza or something. And I imagine him coming back, laden down with food, only to find the disciples have lost their interest in food. They've lost their appetite because they've seen the risen Lord. They're not interested in eating anymore.

Where Thomas had gone out, wherever he'd gone to, he'd left the disciples fearful and cowering because of what had happened to Jesus, locked behind a closed door, traumatized. But he returned to find them telling amazing stories of Jesus being alive. "We've seen the Lord," they said. Thomas is remembered for his doubts, but he could just as easily be remembered for his terrible sense of timing, the disciple who missed the resurrection. And of course, he had to be persuaded that the story that the disciples was telling was true, that Jesus really had been raised from the dead. We have a tendency to think that people who lived a long time ago were rather simple folk, and they'd hear a story about Jesus being risen and they'd think, "Oh, yeah, that's true. Of course."

Well, they needed persuading, just as we would be persuaded that this amazing truth was actually real, that Jesus was really raised from the dead. It was no easier to believe in the resurrection then as it is now. Thomas and his contemporaries would need evidence for the resurrection just as modern sophisticated people need it too. That's why Thomas says, "Unless I see the marks of the nail, put my hand in His side, I won't believe it." It's also why St. John in that epistle that we heard makes a point of emphasizing the evidence of eyewitnesses to the resurrection. "We've seen with our own eyes, we've touched," John says. And St. Paul,

often in the New Testament, again refers to the importance of eyewitness accounts of the resurrection, and he's writing 15 to 20 years after Jesus died, so the eyewitnesses he's talking about were still alive when he wrote. He wants to say that the list of eyewitnesses to the resurrection is well established.

When Paul was in front of the Roman governor, Festus, the governor said to him, "Paul, your learning is driving you insane." And Paul calmly replied, "I'm not insane. What I'm saying about the resurrected Messiah is true and reasonable. None of it was done in a corner." St. Paul, the lawyer, recognized that this resurrection faith is reasonable, something he came to understand after careful, rational thoughts. The resurrection wasn't a secret. It was out in the open. There were hundreds of witnesses. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was no mere illusion. It was not a sign or a metaphor, it was an event that occurred in the material world of history that changed the history of that world. Hence, Thomas, when he finally did meet the risen Jesus, could put his finger in the wounds and his hand in Jesus's side, though he chose not to, because the time Jesus invited him to do this, he'd already had no problem believing. He didn't need any further convincing.

But I want to stay for a moment with the wondrous fact that St. Thomas could have put his finger in Jesus's hands, his hand in the side of Jesus's wound. Jesus's resurrected body still bore the signs of His crucifixion. This victorious body that had conquered sin and death, that had broken out of the grave with a radiant new life was not without blemish. It still had wounds. The resurrected body of Jesus was a scarred body. We live in a culture that's saturated by images of the so-called perfect body. Think of Michelangelo's David or the highly edited photographs that appear in modern advertising, yet we worship a Savior whose body was scarred. The wounded body of Jesus challenges our dominant contemporary notions of perfection.

Too many of us, too many times lose hope because we fail to live up to the profoundly unhelpful and

non-Christian notion of an ideal or perfection. I was talking with somebody recently who expressed the frustration that a weakness they'd been battling for years that they thought they'd conquered comes back in time of tiredness or stress. I can relate to that. How do we respond to such feelings? Do we think, "Oh, I've not really been healed or I'm not making any progress?" That would be a natural response, but not terribly helpful. Remember, we have a wounded Savior. The resurrected body of Jesus is still scarred. It still bears the marks of His crucifixion. It's a body which has been healed, restored and fit to be taken into glory, but it's not perfect in the Michelangelo's sense of David, that flawless statue of his.

So, it is with us, there's no ideal perfect version of us existing somewhere. As God works in us by His spirit to sanctify and heal us, He's not making a perfect version of us. He's restoring us as we are. Even after God has completed His work in us, the scars will remain. Our hope is that we are restored and redeemed, not that we're ever made perfect. Too many of us suffer from the curse of perfectionism, which inevitably condemns us to failure. If we aim at being flawless and perfect, we'll never get there. We'll always be frustrated by our own failings, and that's not what God wants for us. Let's be inspired by looking to our wounded Savior who never escaped the marks of His suffering.

There's a magnificent verse in Romans 8, which I'm sure I'll be quoting again in this Easter season. Paul writes this, "If the spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His spirit that dwells in you." That's an incredible thought. That verse expresses the fullness, the mystery, the richness of this Easter season. Easter wasn't God performing a conjuring trick with bones. It's not a metaphor for some possible future. It's a historical reality which transforms our understanding of life now. The spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead is giving life to our mortal bodies.

The resurrection of Jesus ushered in a new age. God's spirit has come and is at work in us and is the world. Our hope isn't that everything will be perfect. Our resurrection hope is that God is at work now by His spirit, restoring His creation to how it was meant to be. We are involved in that process. We are agents of God's resurrection change. God by His spirit can work in and through us. We are empowered by that same spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. We are an Easter people. In the midst of our sad and desperate world, we are people of hope. The resurrection is a sign to us that evil will not triumph, that death will not have the last word. A great reversal has taken place. We live in the hope that God is at work in His world and in us.

Hallelujah! The Lord is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Hallelujah!