

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



Fr Michael says:

Doubting Thomas

Over the next 50 days we tease out the richness of the Easter Message for us all and so lead us to the Sending Forth by the Spirit to spread the Good News of Jesus, dead and risen for us all, to the wider world. The Acts show the effect of the message on the small Community in Jerusalem and how they were focussed on the worship of God and giving loving service to those in need. It is Faith in the Risen Lord that is the basis of hope for eternal life: thus can we face the challenges of daily life fully, as Peter says. Such was the message behind the words of St Catherine of Siena, quoted by the Bishop of London at the Royal Wedding on Friday: “Be who Christ meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.”

Thomas is our spokesperson, had we been there. His going from doubt to faith is a paradigm for our own journey. I have led five Pilgrimages to the Holy Land over the years, and lived at the House of Caiaphas, the High Priest, for two months, as a student, guiding over 2000 pilgrims and the one over-riding characteristic I noticed was the desire to touch, kiss, walk around the sites, to identify with Jesus’ presence there. They needed photos and souvenirs to mark their visit – so we can have a sneaking sympathy for Thomas and his desire to touch Jesus, before believing.

Faith goes beyond the certainty of touch and feeling, but it was the way that Jesus reached out to so many in need of healing, therefore it is a boost to the weak faith of Thomas. He is wounded, his mind is darkened by doubt, his heart broken by grief – real wounds but invisible, seen only by Jesus, who brought healing through touch.

The human heart is only healed by the presence of another human being who understands human pain: Jesus’ wounds help us see our own and recognise that His are caused by love, as the Good Shepherd, tending His sheep. We see how weak our faith is through our fragility of being – but we can see that Christian Faith is essentially in a Person who love us, as His wounds prove. This is the heart of biblical faith – it is not only the faith we have in God, but the faith he has in US!

The final words of Jesus, “Thomas, you believe because you have seen me, blessed are those who have not seen, but believed!” are a dig at Thomas for his stubbornness, but especially they are a great encouragement to us, who are asked to believe, without having seen or touched Jesus!

“Some people think that if you have enough faith, life will be plain sailing for you – but it is not so! The fact that we can swim doesn’t prevent us from being knocked about by the waves. In the same way, faith doesn’t shield us from the hard knocks of life or death. What then does Faith do? It gives us bearings and enables us to live in a topsy-turvy world, without getting lost or giving in to despair. Just as swimmers trust that if they don’t panic, and if they do a few simple things, then the power of the sea will uphold them – so believers entrust their lives to a power greater than themselves, a power greater than us all! This power is the power of God, who brought His Son, Jesus, back from the dead.”