

Easter 2 – Year ‘A’ – 2017

There must be many times in my own life and no doubt in yours also, when on hearing a piece of news we respond to it in words such as – ‘I don’t believe it’ or ‘are you sure?’

Today’s Gospel reading continues the Resurrection appearances of our Lord, following His first appearance to Mary Magdalene in the Garden.

The Apostles, possibly meeting together in that same place where the Last Supper had taken place with Jesus, but with the exclusion of Thomas, had locked themselves inside the house for fear of the Jewish authorities. As the likely candidates for having stolen away Jesus’ body, they would be the first suspects that the authorities would seek out.

Leaderless, and in fear for their own lives, this demoralised, group of followers, must have felt very vulnerable. That first vision of Jesus, perhaps bringing confusion in their minds, as their eyes

seemed to recognise Him, but their reason causing them to doubt in his physical presence.

What joy it must have been for them then, to hear Jesus speak, those familiar words - *'Peace be with you'* and then to be shown the marks in His body of the crucifixion. Both words and signs, bearing witness to whom he was, and to recall perhaps in their own minds, Jesus' own words, that after three days, they would see Him again. It was only a few days ago that they had received Jesus' commission, as he said to them – *'As the father has sent me, so I send you!'*

And what is this commission?

St. Luke's tells us at the end of his Gospel and at the beginning of the book of Acts, that it is to be His Jesus witnesses. **Mark** at the end of his Gospel says that it is to 'proclaim the Gospel.' **Matthew** completes his Gospel with the command – 'to make disciples of all nations.' And **John**, in his sending them out in today's Gospel reading – continues the 'Mission of the Incarnation' which, began with His,

Jesus, own birth and that believing in Jesus will bring with it new life.

William Temple in commenting on this passage draws our attention to the fact that what Jesus bestowed on the Apostles, was ‘Holy Spirit’, that is the authority of the ‘Holy Spirit.’ All recent translations add the word ‘the’ in front of the words – Holy Spirit. But as William Temple points out in his commentary, in the 7th Chapter of John’s Gospel, verse 39 we read, ‘Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive, for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.’

And also, the command of Jesus to them was to remain in the city of Jerusalem until they received the ‘Holy Spirit.’ The gift of the Holy Spirit is to enable each one of us to be empowered to bear witness to Jesus Christ in our own lives. William Temple goes on to say that – ‘We must not expect the gift while we ignore the purpose. A church which ceases to be

missionary, will not be, and cannot rightly expect to be, 'missionary.'

With a dedication to St. Andrew, the patron saint of missionaries, we certainly need to heed those words. The commission is completed by Jesus passing on to the Apostles, and as a result, to their successors, and the body of Christ in general, the right to pronounce in God's name, forgiveness of sins.

For we simply affirm to those who turn to Christ in penitence, what Jesus himself proclaimed through the Apostles, that all who repent of sins, receive through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, forgiveness.

But it is to be a week later that the unbelieving Thomas is able to affirm his faith in the risen Jesus.

For it is to be a week after Jesus' first appearance before the Apostles, that Thomas gets the opportunity to make his own response. And on this occasion there probably was no need for Thomas to touch Jesus, no need to have any further proof.

Sometimes, it is simply the act of being there, the sign of a person's presence that is needed to convince another. I well remember when our daughter with a friend went on a gap-trip to India, that the official at the Indian High Commission would not sign the visas unless I attended with my proof of identity. An urgent telephone call was received from Melanie for me to come up to London. When I arrived at the High Commission, I didn't have to prove anything, for my presence was proof enough for the official to give permission for the visas to be issued.

Thomas was not with the other disciples at our Lord's first appearance to them. For whatever reason, he had withdrawn from them, and sought sanctuary elsewhere. At times such as these, while it might be right for some to withdraw from the fellowship of close friends and others, there is much to be gained from the support of like, minded persons. But we can take heart from Thomas, who refused to say he believed, when he did not.

How many times people say they understand something when in fact they do not. Thomas doubted and there was nothing wrong in that. He needed reassurance – and as Tennyson wrote – ‘There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds.’ Honest doubt is ok. And often others will thank us for the courage in admitting to it.

The church needs to acknowledge the Thomas’s amongst us, certainly, but it also needs to affirm those for whom faith is not, and has never been a questionable exercise, in order that others may have something, to strengthen their own faith.

As Christians, and perhaps more specifically as an Easter people, we like the Apostles have a challenging commission to achieve. As the Apostle John writes in our Gospel reading for today, we are, ‘called to be sent out.’ Our commission is not solely to maintain this building, important as that is. But having been renewed by our regular visits to it, and the worship we share within it, we are to be sent out,

back into the world. It is as Matthew reminds us, that the purpose in proclaiming that Gospel is – ‘to make disciples of all nations.’

The Easter message is one, which we are called to share with the whole world.

At times vulnerable, and even perhaps confused by our faith, we need to remain steadfast and immovable.

The writer of our epistle says to us today -

‘Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.’

Perhaps if when we receive news from someone, especially when it is of a joyous nature we, should respond in a more positive and accepting manner immediately – and not adopt the Thomas’ way.

23rd April 2017 – 8.00am & 10.00am