

Homily: Second Sunday of Easter, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2020

If you've ever wondered why Sunday is such an important day for us as Christians, look no further than today's Gospel. Today, the eighth day of Easter, we hear of two appearances of the risen Lord. The first takes place on the evening of Easter Sunday; the second the following Sunday. Week by week, Sunday by Sunday, the risen Lord met with His disciples. He has done so every Sunday ever since. And perhaps it's appropriate for us in this moment that the Lord appeared on those first Sundays in a room that was locked, shut – the disciples were on lockdown, in fear of their lives. But it was to them in that moment, with all their doubts, uncertainties and fears, that He came. To them, behind those locked doors, He came. The Lord can break through any barrier. Even the barriers we erect – our lack of faith and trust – His grace can overcome them. Thomas, we are told, 'refused' to believe – He put a barrier between Himself and the risen Lord. But the Lord came to Him and called Him to faith.

The first reading also tells us that, in the early days of the Church, the disciples met in their homes for the breaking of bread. These celebrations of the Eucharist took place in their own houses, in the days before churches were built in honour of the Lord. Today, the Eucharist comes to our homes in a new way; the Mass is celebrated and prayed in our homes in a new way. The risen Lord comes to us in a new way. How beautiful it is! He does not let any barrier prevent Him from coming to us. During the week I received a really lovely letter from someone who had been watching the Holy Week liturgy from St Clare's. Reflecting on the Easter vigil, he wrote some words which really struck me, and moved me. I hope he won't mind me sharing them with you. This is what he wrote:

“Through screen and speakers, the Easter message echoed through hundreds and hundreds of homes – as we watched in darkness, unable to read the Mass booklet by the dim light of the screen, when St Clare's was illuminated it filled our room with light too. The church may not have echoed with our voices, but your voice echoed throughout our homes and the light from St Clare's and from the Gospel was shining on us.”

I think these are very beautiful words, and they express something very beautiful that the Lord is doing in these days. There is a lovely image here of faith spreading – lights being switched on here, in this church, illuminating your homes. Faith proclaimed here, received by the hearts of believers near and far. The light of the resurrection – the light symbolised by the Paschal candle, a light which normally spreads throughout the church building, has been spread this year beyond the confines of these walls. This building cannot contain the news of the resurrection any more than the tomb could contain the body of the risen Lord. Receiving messages from many people,

both from within this parish and from much further afield, I've been struck how often people remark about their spiritual progress in these days. Many people are finding it a prayerful and fruitful time in their relationship with the Lord – it's clear that He is acting in a wonderful way. It's perhaps not everyone's experience, and I think we all look forward to simply being able to come together again in church, but in the meantime, let's be open to the gifts the risen Lord wants to give us in these days, and trust that He is truly with us – all of us.

God always desires to bring good out of suffering. The cross always leads to the resurrection, if it is received with faith. We see this vividly in the wounds of Jesus, which feature so prominently in the Gospel today. These wounds are signs of His suffering, yet they become a path to faith for St Thomas. When the risen Lord is glorified, His wounds are glorified too. On the Paschal candle, this great symbol of the risen Lord, we see five brass studs, each containing a grain of incense. They represent the wounds of our Lord: the crown of thorns, the nails in His hands and feet, the wound in His side. And yet they shine, reflecting the light, helping us to see that the Lord's wounds have been glorified. His body has been glorified. He does not suffer anymore. The cross has led to the resurrection.

Thomas needs to see, to touch these wounds, in order to believe that Jesus has risen from the dead. We do not see with our own eyes. "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe", Jesus tells us. St Peter says something similar in today's second reading: "You did not see Him, yet you love Him; and still, without seeing Him, you are already filled with a joy so glorious that it cannot be described, because you believe. And you are sure of the end to which your faith looks forward, that is, the salvation of your souls." Our Easter faith assures us of this.

Perhaps, like Thomas, we sometimes have moments of doubt, uncertainty. Perhaps sometimes our faith is weak, or seems to disappear altogether. The risen Lord can overcome this barrier, as He showed Thomas – we only need to be open to Him. There's a lovely line in today's Gospel which teaches us something about the tenderness of the Lord. Inviting Thomas to touch His wounds, He says, "Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand: put it into my side. Doubt no longer, but believe." "Look, here are my hands," He says, "Give me your hand." "Give me your hand" – it's almost like a loving parent leading a child forward – "Give me your hand". "Let me lead you – I will guide you, I will keep you safe." This is what the risen Lord says to us. Let us allow Him to take us by the hand and lead us forward. And let us doubt no longer, but believe, and in this faith let us be filled with the glorious joy of the resurrection.

Fr Andrew

