

# Second Sunday of Easter

## EASTER POSTURES

John 20:19-31

Second Sunday of Easter

Analysis by Jerome Burce

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

---

## **DIAGNOSIS: Arms Crossed**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *They Huddle On***

Why is it that Easter 2 degenerates so often and easily into Pound-On-Thomas Sunday? Shouldn't we be hammering even harder on the other guys, the ones who "saw" and "rejoiced" that first Easter night (v. 20)? How is it that a day or two later they're exhibiting next to nothing that will satisfy their colleague's demand to see for himself (v. 25)? To expect this of them would be reasonable, yes? If my brother tells me that he's won the mega-millions lottery, do I really need to see a copy of his bank statement to believe that? Will his new demeanor and behavior, above all the swift change in his spending habits, not persuade me? So if Thomas "will not believe" (v. 25), shall we not pin the blame in large part on the inert ten who continue to sit there in the house with doors shut as if nothing has changed (v. 26)? Hasn't Christ just equipped them with a limitless account at First Parental Peace & Forgiveness (notice: not Savings & Loan) and commissioned them to start spending like mad (vv. 21-22)? And if they were they doing that, do you really think Thomas wouldn't notice and put two and two together?

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Flinching***

Then again, the kind of spending the disciples are equipped and sent to do entails risk, injury and loss—to them! See, for example, the grim future that Jesus predicts for Peter (21:18-19). Could be that in this first Easter week they're

already canny enough to intuit this. Could be too that their in-group chatter, post-appearance, has called to mind recently spoken words about a new commandment (13:34), the implications of which are all too vivid in the wounds of hand and side that Jesus has shown them (v. 20). To embrace this as one's future takes nerve, more of it than a single episode of Now-We-See-Him-Now-We-Don't is likely to excite. Or so they'll doubtless claim. If pushed, their descendants will say the same of the Easter Sunday hoopla they've just been through. Fun while it lasted, but neither fun nor lasting enough to persuade us, once and for all, to thumb our noses at the verities of a pre-Easter world and to pay the price of doing that. Sorry, we haven't the nerve, the confidence, the plain and simple faith that Christ in fact is risen.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Clenched Fists...Again***

No wonder two things keep happening, and then a third. First, Thomas checks in at the local Easter assembly and walks away unimpressed (lovely words, words, words, but so little "show me"). Second, we who watch him go, or note his failure to return, blame him for that. Well, of course we do. Pre-Easter verities—that stuff we haven't the nerve to thumb noses at—require Adam to shift responsibility to anyone but himself. Problem is, that means blaming not just Thomas but finally God, and God's Christ too. ("Where was he when we needed him, or a bit of his razzle dazzle—signs, as John calls them (v. 30)—to cinch the Easter case?") Notice, third, where that leaves us: at odds with the Peacemaker (v. 19); no longer breathing the Spirit of his forgiveness (v. 22); still clinging to the fundamental sin of not believing in him or in the Father who sent him. Still exposed, that is, to the final word on unbelievers: "condemned" (3:18).

## PROGNOSIS: Wounded Hands Wide

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *“See My Holes...Again!”*

Thanks be to God, then, for a Messiah and Son (v. 31) who refuses to let his wounds be wasted. To that end he commits himself to an Easter habit of repetition, a habit that John, alone of the evangelists, observes and accentuates. “Peace be with you,” Jesus says, and in the present text not once but three times (vv. 19, 21, 26). And lest we miss the point, we get that tidy little conclusion to the Gospel (vv. 30-31) which turns out not be a conclusion after all, chapter 21 being tacked on so we get to see Jesus tracking down errant, unbelieving disciples yet again. What was it he had said? “I am the good shepherd” who “lays down his life for the sheep...in order to take it up again” so that “no one will snatch them out of my hand” (10:11, 17, 28). So here is Jesus doing what we fail to do, stuffing bold and lovely words with the meaty substance that our own words lack. Where we dodge responsibility, he grabs hold of it, for us, with both wounded hands. He also makes it plain that our unbelief, far from cowing or disgusting him, will merely egg him on to keep coming to us with those wounds exposed not in blaming judgment but in the graceful greeting of peace everlasting. What was it we were looking for? A sign? The razzle dazzle of a brand new Easter verity? Here it is!

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** : *Grabbing Hold*  
And Thomas sees, and Thomas believes. He does a better job of it than his colleagues do. In fact his heartfelt confession, “My Lord and my God” (v. 28) is the climax of John’s Gospel, the goal that all of Jesus’ doing has been aiming for. After all, with believing comes living, as in post-death Easter living (v. 31; cf. 3:16). How had Jesus put it? “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (10:10). Of abundant lifers, Thomas is the first. That noted, we’d do well to quit reading

Jesus' subsequent comment (v. 29) as a rebuke of Thomas, or even as a gentle critique. Call it rather an observation—you saw me, you believed, emphasis on the “me”—leading to the conclusion that whoever believes apart from that first-hand encounter will have been better blessed in price-paying, wound-flashing colleagues than Thomas was. Could be, in fact, that the better blessing will be Thomas himself as his believing starts doing what Jesus has said it would, producing works like Jesus' own, and even greater ones (14:2).

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) :** *They Cut Loose*

Comes now the madcap spending that is the Church's mission and its gift to the world. Thomas, they say, spent like mad all the way to a martyr's death in India, remitting sins with every step, no doubt. His colleagues, prodded still further by Jesus and then by Jesus' Word and Spirit, did the same. So have countless Christians since, and to this day. So the point this Easter 2 is not to pound on Thomas but to praise him; not to hammer on the other guys but instead to encourage them through another repetition of Jesus' “Peace be with you,” another exhibition in the blessed Sacrament of Christ's own wounds. It will happen, as then, on the week's first day (v. 19) so that the rest of the week will be an Easter week with Jesus popping up behind all manner of closed doors—homes, offices, schools, cars, you name it—via the costly words and deeds of disciples who trust him. Could be that a Tom or two out there will see the wounds in our hands, our side, and, putting two and two and together, will start trusting Jesus too.