

Saturday

Jn 20:24-31 *"But Thomas ... was not with them when Jesus came."*

Thomas has always been presented as the one who doubts, who does not believe that the Lord has appeared to his fellow-disciples, and therefore the Risen Lord reprimands him. I prefer to look at this Apostle in a different way, from a different perspective.

Thomas was one of the Twelve. In the Gospel according to John, we find him in two other texts. When Jesus hears of the death of Lazarus, is glad that he was not there *"so that you may believe"* (Jn 11;15) and wants to go to him with his disciples. Thomas takes the floor and declares *"Let us also go, that we may die with him."* It is not clear why Thomas urges his fellow-disciples in this way. However, it seems to be a courageous statement.

In another text (Jn 14:5), Thomas seems to want to understand properly, to be sure of, the way Jesus is going: *"Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"* To me Thomas does not look like a fearful and naïve person, and the text we are reflecting upon seems to confirm it. Let us look at it.

The Risen Lord appeared to the disciples gathered in the house. As they were afraid, the doors were locked. Thomas was not there (Jn 20:24). Where was he? If he was not in the house, it means, he was outside. We do not know what he was doing. Maybe he was doing something for the other disciples; or he was taking care of someone, or ...

For sure he was not afraid of being outside, of facing the consequences of possibly being arrested because he was a disciple of Jesus. Thomas had the courage to face the situation.

One week later Thomas is with the others; the doors are locked but there is no mention of fear. After the experience of encountering the Risen Lord, receiving His peace, the Holy Spirit and being sent, fear has no more place there. The disciples tell Thomas about their experience but he does not believe them. He wants to see and touch himself. Is this so negative? Not at all.

Let us recall another text from this Gospel (Jn 4:1-47). When the inhabitants of Sychar listened from the Samaritan woman about her encounter with Jesus at the Jacob's well, they went there to see him. They asked Jesus to stay with them and finally they declared to the woman; *"It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for **we have heard for ourselves**, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world."* They heard the witness of the Samaritan woman but their faith was confirmed and grew when they encountered Jesus.

In fact, it is not enough to listen to sermons or to the experience of others. One has to experience personally the Risen Lord in his/her life.

Let us come back to our text.

In order to believe, Thomas wishes to make the experience of encountering the Risen Lord like the others. He is very clear on that: *"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."*

The Risen Lord appears to his disciples as he did a week before. He greets them by giving them the *shalom*. Then, He addresses Thomas: *“Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.”* He grants him to do the same experience of Him that the other disciples had. Is the Lord reprimanding him for doubting? I prefer to hear in the Lord’s words a compassionate and loving way of granting Thomas the experience of encountering Him as the Risen Lord.

As He continues addressing Thomas by telling him that others will have to believe without seeing Him as he did, I hear as if the Lord is telling him: *“Others will not see me as you see me now, they will not touch my hands and my side as you can do now. They will have to believe and experience me in other ways: in the neighbours, in the poor and excluded ...”*

Now to you, site managers and workers in the homeless shelters. In your service, you are privileged, as you have a greater chance to **encounter** and **touch** the Risen Lord in the homeless, the poor. The challenge is to be able to recognise Him in them and so be able to take off your shoes, because *“the place on which you are standing is holy ground”* (Ex 3:5) and so to exclaim with Thomas *“My Lord and my God!”*

Prayer

Heavenly Father,
Grant us your Holy Spirit
So as to be able to open our eyes and hearts
To see and recognise you in the people we serve,
The homeless, the poor, the marginalised.

Make us bold and humble
So as to be able to take off our shoes before them
And to exclaim *“My Lord and my God”*
Amen