

## **BELIEVING AND DOUBTING: 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF EASTER B**

**Brian Gleeson CP**

When we come together for Mass every Sunday we remember Jesus. Our praying the Eucharist is an act of faith - an act of personal faith and an act of group faith. Praying together also helps us all to believe, hope and love more strongly, and so become a stronger community. So much so that It might be said of us what was said today in our First Reading about the first Christian community: *"The whole group of believers was united heart and soul..."*

The faith we share is above all our faith in Jesus Christ. We believe that he has risen from the dead and is alive - alive in himself and alive in us. We believe too that he is still our Teacher, King and Leader. But nobody can do our believing for us. This is powerfully illustrated in our gospel story today.

It's the first Easter Sunday and the disciples are huddled together in a locked room. After what happened to Jesus just two days before, they dare not venture out for fear for their lives. But Jesus himself does not hide away. Suddenly he comes among them. His greeting is peace, and their response is joy. For the story-teller John, Easter Sunday is Pentecost, and the gift of the Spirit is the breath of the Risen Christ. The disciples breathe in the Spirit and the Spirit changes their lives. They will leave the Upper Room changed persons - courageous, energetic and zealous persons - animated, fired up, and propelled outwards by the Holy Spirit.

But one of them is missing. His name is Thomas. While truly one of the group, he's also a distinct, independent self, a real individual. He cannot be both loyal to the group and disloyal to his own inner self. That would make his loyalty deceitful and worthless. For Thomas, honesty and sincerity are, in fact, more important than loyalty and belonging. So when the others say, *"We have seen the Lord,"* he declares strongly and emphatically that before he is willing to believe that Jesus is really risen and alive he must see and test the evidence for himself. He won't accept that claim just on their say-so. So it's his honesty that makes him doubt and has led to him being known ever afterwards as *"Doubting Thomas"*.

We learn from the gospel story that Thomas comes to believe in the Risen Jesus in the same way as the other disciples, i.e. when he sees the Lord for himself. But in the way John tells the story Thomas stands for all those who have not yet seen the Lord in the flesh but who are called to believe in him just the same. That's where you and I come into the story. We are among those many generations of believers ever afterwards of whom it may be said: "*Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.*"

It's understandable that Thomas was so slow to believe. One reason is that he was such a rugged individual, such a self-starter. The other is because he was not present when Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit into his fellow-disciples. But Jesus has given the Spirit to you and me - first at Baptism, then at Confirmation, and subsequently at every Eucharist we celebrate. The Spirit which Jesus gives is the Spirit of truth. It's the same Spirit who empowers us to say to Jesus with Thomas the full truth about him: "*My Lord and my God!*"

Our faith is one of the main gifts the Spirit gives us. But it is not a one-off gift that we lock away in a safe like some precious jewel. As a form of life we must let our faith grow and mature. On the other hand, like other forms of life, our faith can wither and die from neglect and lack of exercise. We need to pray about our faith, think about our faith, and express it in works of love. This does not mean that we will never have any doubts. After all, even Mother Teresa had to struggle with doubts her whole life long.

But if like Thomas we care about what we believe, surely sooner or later our faith will bring us into the presence of the living God! We hope so, and we pray so, for both ourselves and one another.