

Sermon for Sunday after Easter 2020

(written by Fr. Ron Barnes)

Have you met people who deny that Jesus Christ is Risen? I'm sure you have. They simply tell you that no one can rise from the dead, and that anyone who says they can doesn't know about the dying. "Show me" is their usual retort. "Unless you show me, I won't believe that stuff". And they go off laughing at you.

Well I know people like that. Some of them are friends, and others are just people you meet in coffee shops, on TV or on the street. And let's face it. Some of us were people like that once. Some of us believed that: "People don't rise from the dead --- the story about the Resurrection of Jesus is just a nice story. Surely you don't believe all that stuff?"

Well the Gospel for today included a person just like that. His name is Thomas, and he had been one of the disciples of Jesus. But that first Easter evening, when the Risen Jesus appeared to His disciples, Thomas was not with them. I don't know where he was, but he must have been pretty discouraged, seeing Jesus crucified, so that he had become pretty depressed. It was early that next week that some of the disciples met Thomas. And they told him that they had seen Jesus. Alive, Risen, and talking with them. But Thomas laughed. That's absurd he would have said. "Unless I see Him, put my fingers into the holes in His hands, and into the hole in His side, I won't believe", he said.

Let's face it. Many people would say the same thing. People don't rise from the dead, they would say. In our society, people tend to be skeptics. You tell them something, and they want proof. And they want you to provide that proof for them. You can understand what Thomas would have said to the other disciples.

But he did something that our society skeptics don't do. He didn't wait for the proof to be brought to him; he went after it. The next Sabbath, the disciples meet in the Upper Room, and Thomas joined them. He came to see if Jesus had really Risen. And Jesus, the Risen Lord, appeared to them in that Upper Room. Thomas was stunned. When Jesus looked at him, Thomas was speechless. And Jesus said: "Thomas put your finger into the holes in my hands, and the hole in my side, and be not faithless, but believing."

Thomas knelt before Him and cried: My Lord and My God. Now no one in all of history had said exactly that. Thomas was the first. He had changed from a Doubting Thomas to a Believing Thomas in one instant. No proof was needed. Jesus was alive, was Risen, and would always be so.

What happened to Thomas now? The western Church knew that, filled with the Holy Spirit as the other disciples were on Pentecost, witnessing in Jerusalem and Israel, as did the other disciples, Thomas witnessed through Syria, modern day Iraq and Iran, and ended up in India. There, witnessing and teaching, he brought people to know the Risen Christ, and founded a Church in the year 52, which today is called the Mar Thoma Church. It grew in Malabar, India until it was over a million Christians. The rest of the Church had no idea of any of this was happening.

However in the 15th century, Portuguese trading ships navigated around the Horn of Africa, and up to India. There they discovered the Mar Thoma Church growing and witnessing, completely unknown to the rest of the Church in the West.

The Apostle Thomas had grown from a skeptic to a believer, from a believer to a witness, from a witness to a founder of a Church. Today, we know him as Saint Thomas, a wonderful Apostle of Christ, and a true fruit of the Gospel of our Lord.

So if you can witness to others about the truth of the Risen Christ, do not be dismayed if at first others do not believe you. By your faith and love and care, bring them to Church and to know Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Do not be discouraged, but let your Faith and Love direct you. Saint Thomas did it, and so can you. May each of us be the loving witness needed to bring someone else to Christ. May Saint Thomas be your guide. As the Lord said to Thomas, but also says to us: "You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."