



ST. ELIZABETH EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Every year on the Sunday after Pascha (the Sunday of the Resurrection), the lectionary assigns the reading from the Gospel of John about Thomas, also called Didymus, the “Twin.” Although John never uses the word, the “doubting” Thomas story was the final story of John’s Gospel for a reason. (Chapter 21 was added later). John’s Gospel started on a high note as the Word that was God and that was with God in the beginning of creation became manifest in Jesus of Nazareth.

From that point on, John frequently reminds the reader that the historical Jesus is always the “Word Made Flesh.” And that’s the point in this resurrection story that starts with Thomas’ absence when the Risen Christ appeared to his chosen disciples. Thomas doesn’t disbelieve the other disciples when they say they have seen Christ so much as he claims to need physical evidence. When Christ appears again with Thomas present, the outcome is unexpected. Rather than simply responding logically – something along the lines of “Oh, OK, I believe you have risen” – he is the first to refer to Jesus the Anointed as both fully human, fully Divine: “My LORD and my God.” We never hear that he actually touched Jesus, and yet he has exceeded the witness of all the others. John wants us to do the same.

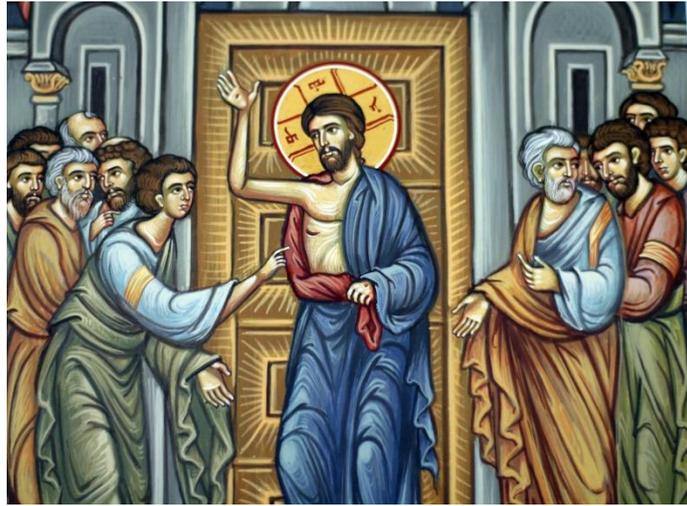
Peter Abelard said, “By doubting we come to inquiry, by inquiry we come to truth.” Just so, we can’t fault Thomas for doubting (even if he didn’t). What Jesus offers Thomas and each of us in post-resurrection encounters is an experience that invites us to hand over our hearts and minds and bodies, so that they can be brought to the fullness of joy. That’s what living an Easter life is all about.

And so, whenever we get to wondering why adolescents stop coming to church, the answer may be right here. At the very stage in life where most people are struggling to enlarge or adapt the faith as it has been taught to them, instead of encouraging them to work out their own answers to enormous questions like, “What of this do **I** believe?” or “How can I believe with integrity?” we often shame them into silence or make them feel somehow less faithful at the very point when they need reassurance and support within their church as they probe, experiment and, yes, doubt, as they move toward a more genuine commitment.

Preparation

If you can, light a new white candle on the table or desk where you are collected. Eggs or flowers, even just pictures from magazines if that’s all you access to, can be placed around the candle. A bare cross, a Triumphant cross or a Christus Rex are also appropriate, as is music as a way to set your heart, mind and soul to be receptive. Our worship is voiced in the plural – “we,” “us” and “our” – because we may be apart, but we are also together.

Second Sunday of Easter
19 April 2020



Centering

Make the sign of the cross as the leader says: May the light of Christ in glory rising scatter the darkness of heart and mind. (+) Alleluia! Christ is risen.

All respond: Alleluia! Christ is risen.

The leader prays: Holy and gracious God, who in your great mercy made glad the disciples with the sight of the Risen Christ; give us such knowledge of his presence with us, that we may be strengthened and sustained by his risen life and serve you continually in righteousness and truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Word of God for Sunday of the Passion: Second Sunday in Easter

The Gospel is the primary reading of the day and should always be read. The Gospel follows after a reading from Hebrew Scripture, a Psalm and a reading from the early church, should you choose to read all the texts for the day.

A reading from Acts: Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and spoke forth to them, “You men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God to you by works of power and wonders and signs that God did by him in the midst of you, even as you yourselves know – this man, being delivered up by the determinate council and foreknowledge of God, you, by the hand of lawless men, crucified and slew, whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him, ‘I beheld the LORD always before my face, for he is at my right hand, that I should not be moved. Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced. Moreover my flesh also shall dwell in hope because you will not leave my soul to Hades, nor will you give your Holy One to see corruption. You made known to me the ways of life. You shall make me full of gladness with your countenance.’”

“Brethren, I may say to you freely of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being a prophet and knowing that God has sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins one should sit upon his throne, he, foreseeing

this, spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he left to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus did God raise up, of which we all are witnesses.”

Reader: The Word of the Lord

Response: Thanks be to God

(The response: Prayed together or by alternating verses) Psalm 16

David's song of healing

God! Keep me safe,
for I have taken cover in You.

I have said to YHWH, “You are my LORD;
Although I am of little worth,
You are good to me—and kind.”
Some who are earthbound
think of the idols
as sacred and mighty,
falsely supposing that their desires
will be fulfilled by them.
Rushing after idols; their sorrows will increase.
I will not make libations of blood to them;
I will not put their names on my lips.

YHWH! You are my chosen portion and my cup:
You keep me in Your care.
Your Providence is pleasing to me;
What a good heritage is now mine.
I will bless You, YHWH, for Your counsels to me,
how in dreams You give me wise guidance.
I place myself constantly in Your Presence;
I will not falter because You are at my side.

Therefore my heart is joyous,
my guts feel delight.
My body is serene,
for You will not forsake my soul to torment,
neither will You let down your devotee.

Please! Make me know the path of life.
My complete happiness is in Your Presence;
may I forever feel the pleasures of your kindness.

A reading from the first letter of Peter: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus the Anointed, who through the resurrection of Jesus the Anointed from the dead regenerated us according to his plenteous mercy for a living hope. For an imperishable and undefiled and unfading inheritance kept in the heavens for you, Who through faithfulness are protected by the power for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, In which you greatly rejoice,

even though just now you are (if need be) grieved by a variety of trials for a little while yet, So that the proof of your faithfulness – far more precious than gold that perishes, though it be proven by fire – might be found, leading to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus the Anointed, Whom you love without seeing, in whom – having faith, although not now seeing – you exult with ineffable and glorious joy, Obtaining the end of your faithfulness: salvation of souls.

Reader: The Word of the Lord

Response: Thanks be to God

A reading from John: When, therefore, it was early evening of that first day of the Sabbath-week, and where the disciples were the doors had been sealed for fear of the Judeans, Jesus came and stood in their midst and says to them, "Peace to you." And, saying this, he showed them both his hands and his side. Thus, on seeing the LORD, the disciples were overjoyed. So [Jesus] again said to them, "Peace to you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you." And, saying this, he breathed on them and says, "Receive a Holy Spirit. For those sins you let go, they are let go; those you hold fast, they have been held fast." But one of the Twelve, Thomas (which meant "Twin"), was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to 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 hand in his side, I most certainly will not have faith." And eight days later, his disciples his disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. The doors being sealed, Jesus comes in and stood in their midst and said, "Peace to you." Then he says to Thomas, "Bring your finger here and look at my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and cease to be faithless, but be faithful instead." Thomas answered and said to him, "My LORD and my GOD!" Jesus says to him, "You have faith because you have seen me? How blissful are those who do not see and who have faith."

Of course, Jesus performed many other signs as well before the disciples, which have not been recorded in this book; But these ones have been recorded so that you might have faith that Jesus is the Anointed, the Son of God, and that in having faith you might have life in his name.

Sermon: The genius Jesuit theologian Fr. Karl Rahner opened his doctoral dissertation titled "Spirit in the World" with a German phrase, "*Man fragt.*" In English, the phrase means "a person asks a question." His point was that the desire to learn about mysteries – the pursuit of knowledge – is definitively human.

Our curiosity begins when we are tiny babies working out just what that object is that passes in front of our face from time to time. That's how we discover our own hand. As we get older, our curiosity might involve oddities outside our bodies: How does the moon follow us when we walk? Where did my goldfish go when it died?

New observations, new situations, stimulate more intangible questions: Should I be an artist or go to law school? Who am I attracted to and why? Our curiosities signal that we do know at least a little about what we are noticing. They are evidence both of our desire to know more and our trust that there is more to know.

In adulthood, life changes prompt or provoke us to notice and to be curious about the life we have lived and what may come next: Was I a good parent, a good friend, a good spouse? What legacy am I leaving behind me? What is it, God, that you would have me do now? At any stage of life, our minds can discern fruitful answers and once we have them, before long we are restless again. These new insights blend with memories and explanations that we have collected, tested and refined, forming the background from which we can begin to notice new frontiers, new mysteries.

Or a new vantage point on a timeless mystery.

For as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by the liturgy of the Great Vigil of Pascha – the ritual that has ancient roots in the Armenian Orthodox Church. It was in the dark of a Paschal Vigil that I first saw a thurible pouring smoke into the darkness of a church nave lit only by a pot holding the newly blessed fire.

From there, my interest was only intensified by priests asking me to read and then teaching me to serve at the altar in various roles. As an ordained deacon, I was drawn still deeper into participating in the Paschal mystery and finally, I could preside at the ritual that refuels the energy of every Mass for the rest of the church year: the return of the Light of Christ that never really leaves.

In years past, at other churches, the sanctuary was draped in the deep darkness of an early Sunday morning. At St. Elizabeth, we gather as the light dims on the evening of Holy Saturday. Either way, in the stillness of Holy Saturday, we bless the new fire and the new Paschal candle. Then we light the new candle and I walk the newly blessed flame slowly toward the altar, stopping to chant one of the names of the mystery: “The Light of Christ.” Voices from the shapes in the gray respond: “Thanks be to God.”

Two acolytes offer flames from the new fire to those in the pews who pass that same flame around until a single candle flame has been multiplied sometimes a hundred-fold. The nave takes on a warm orange glimmer – a gentle reminder that the candle is only making visible the Uncreated Light that is always present. We welcome Christ to renew us through a portal in the mystery by chanting the Exultet and then we begin the readings.

Now, what you probably don’t know, is that while the readings are underway, I often watch the moving, flickering light that we have just spread across the entire sanctuary. And then I imagine that light moving out into the gardens just outside the walls of the nave.

From there, I like to imagine it spreading across 152nd and flowing over 10th Avenue.

Filling Old Burien and picking up momentum until it is lighting up all of greater Seattle, then King County and, well, you get the idea. Thousands of Paschal flames being passed from friend to friend, stranger to stranger, until every heart is lit with God’s love for every person, every creature, every living entity.

This year, the Paschal Vigil came. Resurrection Sunday came. Nothing can ever stop that. Even the vision of light spreading from the sanctuary out past the walls came.

But this time, it was different. I couldn’t see the people of St. Elizabeth sitting in the pews.

Now, I have come to expect to notice the congregation as a manifestation of the body of Christ – an embodiment that I can see, especially during the movements of the Great Vigil.

This year, there were no people in the sanctuary and no one would actually see this Paschal Mass for at least another day.

And so, there was something new, some challenge to shift my awareness. Like Thomas, I became curious as I was confronted by the confounding. John's Risen Christ asked Thomas: "You have faith because you have *seen* me?" And the Light of Christ put the same question and challenge to me: "You have faith because you have seen me? How blissful are those who do *not* see and who have faith."

This is the point that John's Gospel makes, literally, "in the beginning" and throughout the entire Gospel. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was present with God and the Word was God.

What John's Gospel consistently points to is that which we apprehend beyond what we can see with our eyes. To witness with the eye of spirit, seeing just who Jesus the Anointed, the Risen Christ, really is. That's why John directs the last paragraph of this Gospel reading at us – at you and at me and all those who have not seen Jesus of Nazareth with our naked eyeballs and yet have faith.

John's Gospel has recorded these signs so that we might have faith that Jesus is the Anointed, the Son of God, and that in having faith we might have the life that is in Christ. So that instead of becoming cynical, we might become trusting. So that instead of becoming certain, we might become curious. So that instead of becoming unfaithful to the love of God and the light of Christ, we might become more faithful.

And, so that, as Peter wrote, the proof of our faithfulness might be found, leading to praise and glory and honor at the revelation. And then Peter beautifully names the purpose of our faithfulness: the salvation of souls.

We are in the midst of a new experience that challenges our ability to notice the body of Christ, to apprehend without understanding fully the Light of Christ in our midst.

Fortunately, we have explanations that will still serve us on this new frontier. Think about it: Love, loneliness, confusion, compassion, loyalty – none of these have visible physical presence of their own.

We notice only the consequences of their existence. We see love and compassion when they show up as people choosing to serve others knowing that they are exposed to risk. We see trust and loyalty as people choose to stay separated as much as possible to protect others. Makes no sense to ask how much another person's loneliness weighs. But we can check in with each other. Ridiculous to wonder how many cubic inches a person's suffering measures. But we can offer to be with them, even if only by phone or email or Zoom for now.

In just the same way, once we have noticed and embraced the light of the Anointed, we begin to see the influence of that presence around us. Maybe Thomas doubted, maybe not. Regardless, he moved toward the unknown and went on to wake other people up to that presence in their own lives.

Because the Light of Christ, do you see, is not for us. It is given to us to be given away. In time, we come to see that God, whom we love without seeing, is loving other people *through* us. The outcome of our faith is God's exulting "with ineffable and glorious joy" radiating through our actions for a world in need of love; in need of light; in need of life in the name of the Anointed One.

Silence and stillness

The Nicene Creed

Leader: Let us reaffirm our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God,

the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,

the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.

Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:

by the power of the Holy Spirit

he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

With the Father and the Son he (or “she” or no pronoun) is worshiped and glorified.

He (she/who) has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,

and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers for the church, the world, and all who are in need

These intercessions may be used, adding others in each household:

Leader: God the Father, your will for all people is health and salvation.

All: We praise and bless you, LORD.

Leader: God the Son, you came that we might have life, and might have it more abundantly.

All: We praise and bless you, LORD.

Leader: God the Holy Spirit, you make our bodies the temple of your presence.

All: We praise and bless you, LORD.

Leader: Holy Trinity, one God, in you we live and move and have our being.

All: We praise and bless you, LORD.

Leader: In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer, we pray for the Church of Church of Ireland.

In the Diocesan Cycle of Prayer, we pray for St. John Sudanese, Tukwila; St. George, Maple Valley.

We pray for our neighbors at Navos, for Neighborhood House, for Hospitality House, for Operation Nightwatch, and for the safety of those in military service. We pray for the safety and stamina of healthcare workers, for first responders and for their families.

We pray for those on our long-term list.

Let us pray for our own needs and those of others, offered silently or aloud.

Leader: Lord, grant your healing grace to all who are sick, injured or disabled, that they may be made whole.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: Grant to all who are lonely, anxious or depressed, a knowledge of your will and an awareness of your presence.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: Grant to all who minister to those who are suffering wisdom and skill, sympathy and patience.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: Mend broken relationships, and restore to those in distress soundness of mind and serenity of spirit.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: Sustain and support those who seek your guidance and lift up all who are brought low by the trials of this life.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: Grant to the dying peace and a holy death, and uphold by the grace and consolation of your Holy Spirit those who are bereaved.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: Restore to wholeness whatever is broken by human sin, in our lives, in our nation, and in the world.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: You are the LORD who does mighty wonders.

All: You have declared your power among the peoples.

Leader: With you, LORD, is the well of life

All: and in your light do we see light.

Leader: Hear us, LORD of life:

All: heal us, and make us whole.

Let us pray.

A period of silence follows, and then:

Leader: Hear the prayer we offer for all your people. Remember in your mercy those for whom we pray: heal the sick, raise the fallen, strengthen the fainthearted, protect those who serve, and enfold in your love the fearful and those who have no hope.

In the fullness of time complete your gracious work. Reconcile all things in Christ and make them new, that we may be restored in your image, renewed in your love, and serve you as sons and daughters in your kingdom.

Through your anointed Son, Jesus Christ, our LORD, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit we lift our voices of thanks and praise:

All: Blessed be God, our strength and our salvation, now and for ever. *Amen.*



After a moment, the leader says: Let us confess our sins against God and neighbor

All pray together: Almighty God, our heavenly Father:

We have sinned against you,
through our own fault,

in thought, and word, and deed,
and in what we have left undone.

For the sake of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ,
forgive us all our offenses;

and grant that we may serve you
in newness of life,

to the glory of your Name. *Amen.*

All make the sign of the cross as the leader says:

May the Almighty God grant us forgiveness of all our sins,
and the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Pater Noster/Our Father/The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Prayer of spiritual communion

Most Holy Christ, we trust that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. We love you above all things, and we long for you in our souls. Since we cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into our hearts. We embrace you as though you were already there and we unite ourselves entirely to you. Never permit us to be separated from you. *Amen.*

Concluding Prayer

Almighty Father,

Who in your great mercy made glad the disciples
with the sight of the risen LORD:

give us such knowledge of his presence with us,

that we may be strengthened and sustained by his risen life

and serve you continually in righteousness and truth;

through Jesus Christ our LORD. *Amen.*

Blessing

Make the sign of the cross as you say:

May Christ, (+) who by death has destroyed death, give us all courage and joy in believing.
Amen.

Giving Thanks at Table

You are welcome to use this thanksgiving whenever you are at table for a meal.

Leader: Prove yourselves innocent and straightforward, children of God beyond reproach.

All: Shine in this generation like stars in the sky.

Leader: God is generous with all His gifts and holy in all His works, living and reigning for ever and ever.

All: Amen

Leader: Grant eternal life to all who do good to us in your name.

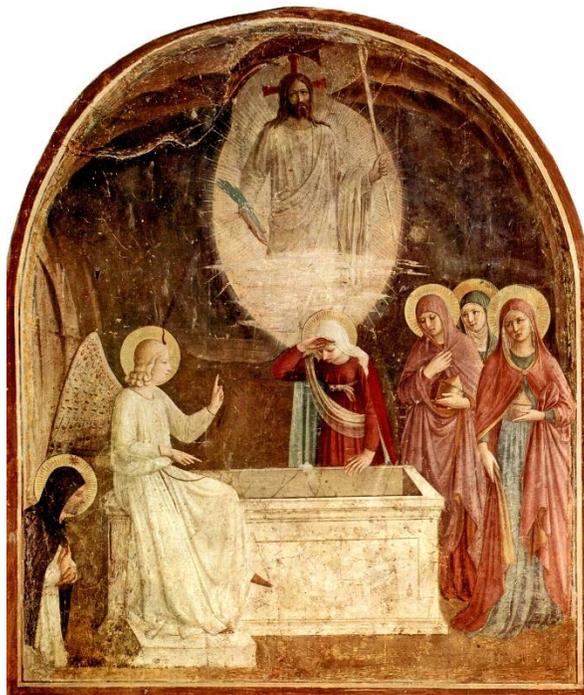
All: Amen.

Leader: Let us bless the LORD.

All: Thanks be to God.

Leader: May the souls of the faithfully departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

All: Amen.



“The concept of ‘God’ is not a grasp of God by which a person masters the mystery; but it is the means by which one lets oneself be grasped by the mystery which is present yet ever distant.”

~ Fr. Karl Rahner, SJ

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