

*A Sermon Preached by Fr Derek Frost  
on 1 May, 2011  
John 20 : 19-31*

Today's Gospel Reading from the twentieth Chapter of Saint John's beautiful Gospel really excites the imagination. We can almost feel the fear and anxiety that pervades the house where the disciples were huddled together for fear of the Jews. We can surely understand and sympathise with the fear and anxiety they were feeling. In the last few days, they had been through so much.

They had been part of that great triumphant ride into Jerusalem. Jesus seated on his donkey, fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy that the Messiah King would enter the Holy City riding on an ass. The crowds waving Palm branches and shouting, "Hosanna to the Messiah King". They really thought that Jesus had turned a corner and would take his power and reign and drive out the Romans and establish his Kingdom on earth, and they would be his chosen leaders to rule with Him. They had shared that intimate Passover supper with him and had their feet washed by Him and heard him say those awesome words over the bread and wine.

*"This is my body, this is my blood, this do in remembrance of me."*

They could not imagine what was to follow. Judas going out into the night. Then there were the events in the garden. Jesus at prayer heavy in spirit. Judas arriving with the soldiers. The arrest of Jesus. The trials before the High Priest and Pilate. The false accusations. The humiliations and beatings. The carrying of the Cross. The stripping and crucifixion of the Master. The agonising death against the panorama of a darkened sky. That cry of desolation:

*"My God, My God why hast thou forsaken me".*

Then the silence and the death.

Now the talk of an empty tomb and Angels and the possibility of resurrection. It was all too much. They lived on their nerves. Every sound in the street every noise on the stairs filled them with dread and fear. Would they soon drink of the Master's Cup and be nailed to Crosses.

Then into this dread and tension comes the risen Jesus and speaks those immortal words:

*"Peace be with you"*

They could see the marks of the Passion on his Holy and glorious body. Then they rejoiced when they saw the Lord. He told them that as the Father had sent Him so He was sending them. He breathed on them and imparted His Holy Spirit to them, a foreshadowing of the power that would come at Pentecost. He then tells them that if they forgive peoples sins they are forgiven and if they retain the sins of any they are retained. A solemn reminder to us that the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church must call people to faith and repentance, an awesome task in a world so full of sin and shame. Jesus by his death and resurrection has broken the power of sin but the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church must never cease to make that known and continue the work of healing and reconciliation and making men and women whole, as God would have them be. That room once so full of dread and fear is now a room full of joy and hope a room full of that Peace of God that passes all understanding.

One of the eleven is missing during this amazing time - Thomas the twin. When he re-joins the others they tell him the fantastic news. Thomas, good honest Thomas, cannot believe it. It is all too much. Grief motivated hysteria. "I would need to see the Master myself", he says, "and place my fingers and hands in the marks of his Passion". Who can blame Him ... poor doubting Thomas.

His friends don't ridicule or turn on him; they keep him in their midst a valued part their fellowship, they love him and embrace him. There is lesson for the Church here. Let us never turn our back on those whose faith is dim and fading but rather surround them with our love and prayers and keep them in our fellowship. The Church must be big enough to contain the doubting Thomases of this world. God can use them to His glory. A tested faith can often become a very powerful faith – Thomas was to prove that.

A week later again behind closed doors the disciples including Thomas were together for mutual support help and comfort. Jesus again comes and stands among them. Once again, He says, "Peace be with you", and once again that Peace comes and enfolds them and Thomas can share it.

Jesus invites Thomas to touch the marks of his sacred Passion telling him not to doubt but to believe. Thomas has no need of this but affirms what the Church affirms of Jesus that He is Our Lord and Our God.. Jesus gently rebukes Thomas.

*"Have you believed because you have seen me?  
Blessed are those who have not seen and yet come to believe."*

The mission of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church is to proclaim by word and deed that Jesus is Lord. We commend our faith by the way we live so that through the Church, the body of Christ, the unseen Lord might make Himself known. Thomas went on to live and die in the service of the Master. He made known to others his Lord and his God. What Thomas did is what the Church is called to do, to make known the Master and proclaim Him as Lord and God.

Eleven bewildered and frightened men who lived in fear and dread following the death of the Lord, encountered the risen Lord and were transformed by Him and in the power of the Spirit went on to transform the world. The work still goes on today and must go on until the risen and ascended Lord returns to bring all things to their conclusion and the final transformation takes place.

The Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church must always teach the faith delivered to the Saints, not watering it down or adding to it in the false hope we can make it more acceptable.

The words of Saint Peter from His first Epistle make a fitting close to these poor words of mine.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!  
By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living Hope through the  
resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. [1 Peter 1:3]*

Although you have not seen Him, you love him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and rejoice with an indescribable joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the Salvation of your souls.

**"Alleluia Christ is risen. He is risen indeed alleluia!"**