

Homily - 2nd Sunday of Easter

JN 20:19-31

Deacon Thom

Today's Gospel recalls a story that most of us have come to know as "Doubting Thomas." I believe that Thomas was not so much doubting as he was feeling hurt or diminished. Consider this man who traveled with Jesus for three years, through complicated times, good times and then the most fearful and horrible times of his crucifixion. While the others were cowering behind locked doors, Thomas was out buying food for the group. And despite all that he had been through following Jesus, Jesus chooses THIS moment to return; the few minutes when he was not there because he was out buying provisions! Who wouldn't feel hurt or neglected or diminished in some ways! So out of his hurt he proclaims, *...unless I put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe!*

Yet as the story unfolds, upon Jesus' second return, this time with Thomas there, Jesus invites Thomas to come forward to touch the nail marks and the wound in his side. But it is important to note that Thomas does not need to do that to believe. He never reaches out to touch him! Instead he falls to his knees and proclaims, "My Lord and my God!" Thomas just needed to be recognized as worthy, of having value and affirmed.

When Jesus appears, John writes that he ... *breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."* It is important to note that John uses the words *breathed on them* when he first appears, and then uses the word *said* when he encounters Thomas on his second appearance; important because these are the words that are used throughout the Creation Story. If you recall, throughout each of the six days of creation, creation happened with the words, *and then God said...* God breathes his Spirit and there is life! One of the many titles that we give to God is "Breath of Life." Often this title is given to the person of the Holy Spirit.

So Jesus appears and uses his "breath" and "words" to impart on them the new life of the Holy Spirit. This story is as much about creation of new life as it is about anything. From this encounter, the new life of Christ was imparted to them, implanted inside them, so that they would become the sources of courage and wisdom that would allow them to go forth in spreading the good news of Jesus. The Spirit imparted to them on this day became a seed of new life, not only within them as humans, but for generations of humans across the entire globe from that point on. The Breath of Life Jesus breathed into them not only created new life for them, but spread and is still active in millions of lives even now, more than 2,000 years later!

It is an important story for us, because we have the power to be God's source of new life in other people. We are called to go forth, proclaiming the good news, speaking with people, being a presence to those in need, touching the hands and hearts of those grieving, filling the bowls of those who are hungry, helping to shelter those with no place to live. From this early account after the Resurrection and the commissioning that we will commemorate at the feast of Pentecost, we are to be transformed into the active Breath of Life that God is sending forth to bring light to those we meet.

So, as we reflect on this story, I assume that most of us have felt the rejection and hurt experienced by Thomas at one time or another. And also like Thomas, that did not mean that we have lost our faith. But rather it humbles us and allows us to be open to receiving the healing touch of Christ through words and actions of those God puts in our path. So we feel today the Breath of Life washing over and through us, and hear the same words heard by the apostles, "Receive the Holy Spirit!" Let us go forth with courage and humility, spreading God's Breath of Life along the road in our journey home.