

ZE09041901 - 2009-04-19

Permalink: <http://zenit.org/article-25650?l=english>

# Allowing the Presence of the Risen Jesus to Make a Difference

## Biblical Reflection for the Second Sunday of Easter or Divine Mercy Sunday

By Father Thomas Rosica, CSB

TORONTO, APRIL 19, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://zenit.org)).- There is a proverb that says: "When the heart is not applied, hands can't do anything." It seems as if this were written for Thomas the Apostle in today's very familiar Gospel story that provides us with an archetypal experience of doubt, struggle and faith.

John's first appearance of the Risen Lord to the disciples is both intense and focused. It is evening, the first day of the week, and the doors were bolted shut. Anxious disciples are sealed inside. A suspicious, hostile world is forced tightly outside. Jesus is missing. Suddenly, the Risen One defies locked doors, blocked hearts, and distorted vision and simply appears. Jesus reaches out ever so gently to the broken and wounded Apostle. Thomas hesitatingly put his finger into the wounds of Jesus and love flowed out. How can you hear this story without thinking of Caravaggio's magnificent painting of this scene?

Who is this Thomas? He, along with many of the other male disciples, stood before the cross, not comprehending. Thomas' dreams were hanging on that cross and his hopes had been shattered. Over the years I have come to see Thomas as truly one of the greatest and most honest lovers of Jesus, not the eternal skeptic, nor the bullish, stubborn personality that the Christian tradition has often painted. I have never enjoyed being called "doubting Thomas" when I was growing up, simply because I liked to ask questions! I used to secretly hope that I was named after Aquinas, More, Becket or Villanova. But my mother insisted that it was the Apostle they chose for me!

Thomas' struggle and ours

What do we do when something to which we have totally committed ourselves is destroyed before our very eyes? What do we do when powerful and faceless institutions suddenly crush someone to whom we have given total loyalty? And what do we do when our immediate reaction in the actual moment of crisis is to run and hide, for fear of the maddening crowds? Such were the questions of most of the disciples, including Thomas, who had supported and followed Jesus of Nazareth for the better part of three years.

The doubting Thomas within each of us must be touched. We are asked to respond to the wounds first within ourselves then in others. Even in our weakness, we are urged to breathe forth the Spirit so that the wounds may be healed and our fears overcome. With Thomas we will believe, when our trembling hand finally and hesitantly reaches out to the Lord in the community of faith. The words addressed to Thomas were given to us: "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed!"

Long ago St. Gregory the Great said of Thomas the Apostle: "If, by touching the wounds on the body of his master, Thomas is able to help us overcome the wounds of disbelief, then the doubting of Thomas will have

## ZENIT

been more use to us than the faith of all the other apostles."

Centuries after Thomas, we remain forever grateful for the honesty and humanity of his struggle. Though we know so little about Thomas, his family background and his destiny, we are given an important hint into his identity in the etymology of his name in Greek: Thomas (Didymous in Greek) means "twin". Who was Thomas' other half, his twin? Maybe we can see his twin by looking into the mirror. Thomas' other half is anyone who has struggled with the pain of unbelief, doubt and despair, and has allowed the presence of the Risen Jesus to make a difference.

Divine Mercy is not an option!

Over the past few years, I have listened to not a few liturgists and pastoral ministers complaining about the fact that this Sunday was given a new name by Pope John Paul II in the Jubilee Year 2000. Officially called the Second Sunday of Easter after the liturgical reform of Vatican II, now, by Decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, the name has been changed to: "Second Sunday of Easter, or Divine Mercy Sunday."

Pope John Paul II made the surprise announcement of this change in his homily at the canonization of St. Maria Faustina Kowalska on April 30, 2000. On that day he declared: "It is important then that we accept the whole message that comes to us from the Word of God on this Second Sunday of Easter, which from now on throughout the Church, will be called 'Divine Mercy Sunday.'"

What do the visions of a Polish nun have to do with Thomas the Apostle's encounter with the Risen Lord? Do we have to 'force' a link between Divine Mercy and the Gospel story of Thomas and the Risen Jesus? The answer to the first question is: "Everything!" and to the second: "No!"

Clearly, the celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday does not compete with, nor endanger the integrity of the Easter Season, nor does it take away from Thomas' awesome encounter with the Risen Lord. Divine Mercy Sunday is the Octave Day of Easter, celebrating the merciful love of God shining through the whole Easter Triduum and the whole Easter mystery.

The connection is more than evident from the scripture readings for this first Sunday after Easter. At St. Faustina's canonization, Pope John Paul II said in his moving homily: "Jesus shows his hands and his side [to the Apostles]. He points, that is, to the wounds of the Passion, especially the wound in his heart, the source from which flows the great wave of mercy poured out on humanity."

### The Meaning of the Day

Divine Mercy Sunday is not a new feast established to celebrate St. Faustina's revelations. In fact it is not about St. Faustina at all! Rather it recovers an ancient liturgical tradition, reflected in a teaching attributed to St. Augustine about the Easter Octave, which he called "the days of mercy and pardon," and the Octave Day itself "the compendium of the days of mercy."

The Vatican did not give the title of "Divine Mercy Sunday" to the Second Sunday of Easter merely as an "option," for those dioceses who happen to like that sort of thing! This means that preaching on God's mercy is not just an option for this Sunday. To fail to preach on God's mercy this day would mean largely to ignore the prayers, readings and psalms appointed for that day, as well as the title "Divine Mercy Sunday" now given to that day in the Roman Missal.

Several years ago, when I, too, was finding difficulty in seeing the internal links between the Second Sunday of Easter, my patron saint, Thomas, and Sr. Faustina's revelation for this day, I came across this wonderful

## ZENIT

quote by St. Bernard (Canticle 61, 4-5: PL 183, 1072): "What I cannot obtain by myself, I appropriate (usurp!) with trust from the pierced side of the Lord, because he is full of mercy.

"My merit, therefore, is God's mercy. I am certainly not poor in merits, as long as he is rich in mercy. If the mercies of the Lord are many (Psalm 119:156), I too will abound with merits. And what about my justice? O Lord, I will remember only your justice. In fact, it is also mine, because you are for me justice on the part of God."

Then the light went on for me. From that moment onward, I no longer regret being named after this Thomas and not the others! Thomas' encounter with the Risen Lord gave me a whole new perspective on the meaning of mercy.

And that has made all of the difference.

[The readings for the Second Sunday of Easter or Divine Mercy Sunday are Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24; 1 John 5:1-6; John 20:19-31]

\* \* \*

Basilian Father Thomas Rosica is the chief executive officer of the Salt and Light Catholic Media Foundation and Television Network in Canada. He can be reached at: [rosica@saltandlighttv.org](mailto:rosica@saltandlighttv.org).

--- --- ---

On the Net:

Reflection on Jesus and Thomas: [http://www.saltandlighttv.org/prog\\_slprog\\_snl\\_presents\\_easter\\_video2.html](http://www.saltandlighttv.org/prog_slprog_snl_presents_easter_video2.html)

Salt and Light Web site:

[www.saltandlighttv.org/prog\\_slprog\\_snl\\_presents\\_lenten\\_video1.html](http://www.saltandlighttv.org/prog_slprog_snl_presents_lenten_video1.html)

© Innovative Media, Inc.

Reprinting ZENIT's articles requires written permission from the [editor](#).