



SUNDAY 7 APRIL 2024

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

The Parishes of: Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

Second Sunday of Easter (B) John 20: 19-31

We're used to calling him 'Doubting Thomas', but he seems more than a doubter—he's very definite and forthright, flatly refusing to accept that Jesus had risen. This is Thomas the Apostle. We meet him in today's Gospel.

Maybe he'd always been of the "prove it!" kind in discussions, never colluding if he didn't agree or find assurance. A down to earth pragmatist, full of questions. Remember the comforting words of Jesus that the Gospel writer St John puts into the mouth of Jesus at the Last Supper—'I go now to prepare a place for youYou know the way to the place where I am going'. It's Thomas who says 'Lord, we do not know where you are going so how can we know the way?' It's a rewarding question.

Thomas was missing when the risen Lord first appeared to the group of apostles. Was he a loner, needing to be off on his own with his grief over Jesus' brutal death and the shattered hopes of his immediate followers? He's hurt. In his world view he's not going to invest in stories of Jesus being alive. Things like that are fanciful. They don't happen.

But if seeing is believing then touch is even better. Jesus comes back for Thomas—to give him the proof he stipulated. He can put his finger into the holes the nails made in Jesus' hands, though I suspect he never then needed to do that.

The language of touch is sacred and conveys so much. Covid taught us that. Thomas said he needs to touch Jesus to feel reassurance. When the Lord comes back for him, it's the very gift he offers.

We learn so much through experience. Hearsay and teaching, no matter how authoritative, doesn't quite do it the same. Touching Jesus is a two-way street, he is also touching us. The intimacy of Eucharist draws us into a simple and daring union with the same Lord that Thomas came to know all over again now as the one God who'd walked with him as a friend without him knowing. The touch of God in Communion can take us into new understandings. Thomas was never the same again.

Jesus comes to each of us personally. We're each different. With God it's come as you are. You're loved nonetheless. Being accepted is more likely to inspire change than change being a prior requirement for acceptance. The Lord works through each of us, unbeknown to us most of the time. If, like the frightened Apostles, we lock our doors to others, God has his own ways of coming in.



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Pope Francis on true holiness

Holiness is not about swooning in mystic rapture. As Saint John Paul II said: if we truly start out anew from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified. The text of Matthew 25:35-36 is not a simple invitation to charity: it is a page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ. In this call to recognize him in the poor and the suffering, we see revealed the very heart of Christ, his deepest feelings and choices, which every saint seeks to imitate.

Given these uncompromising demands of Jesus, it is my duty to ask Christians to acknowledge and accept them in a spirit of genuine openness. In other words, without any “ifs or buts” that could lessen their force. Our Lord made it very clear that holiness cannot be understood or lived apart from these demands, for mercy is the beating heart of the Gospel.

If I encounter a person sleeping outdoors on a cold night, I can view him or her as an annoyance, an idler, an obstacle in my path, a troubling sight, a problem for politicians to sort out, or even a piece of refuse cluttering a public space. Or I can respond with faith and charity, and see in this person a human being with a dignity identical to my own, a creature infinitely loved by the Father, an image of God, a brother or sister redeemed by Jesus Christ. That is what it is to be a Christian!

Can holiness somehow be understood apart from this lively recognition of the dignity of each human being?

Rejoice and be Glad—paras 96-98