

**Second Sunday of Easter**  
**April 11, 2015**  
**Homily for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass**  
**of**  
**St. Thomas More Catholic Parish**  
**celebrated at**  
**St. Joseph Catholic Church**  
**Scranton, PA**  
**John 20:19-31**

When the disciples told St. Thomas that they had seen Jesus on Easter Sunday, Thomas demanded proof. He said he would have to physically handle the resurrected Christ before he would believe that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. His response in this regard was both immediate and emphatic, and the effect it had was that it ended all discussion of the resurrection appearance that the other ten had witnessed. You'll notice that St. John does not record in his Gospel anything the other disciples said in return. In the face of such insistent unbelief, the ten simply fell silent.

This silence mirrors our own response very often to doubters and scoffers when we encounter those who refuse to admit the reality of the supernatural. Instead of asking questions, probing to find out more, people in the mold of our doubting Thomas flat out refuse to have a discussion. They have their minds made up, and we are concerned rightly that challenging their intransigence may push them to become even more stalwart in their rejection of faith. We fall silent when confronted with a doubting Thomas, lest we unintentionally contribute to his becoming a militant atheist.

At the same time, however, we have to feel sorry for the person who is insistent in unbelief. We pity him in his doubt, for as long as he fails to make the good confession, he is losing opportunities to see Jesus active in the world. We know that the refusal to admit the supernatural means that the doubting Thomas is alone, alienated from those with whom he has much else in common.

A few years ago our family experienced a minor miracle, nothing like being a witness to the resurrection, but of course pointing to it. My wife and I had just spent weeks removing a wart from my daughter's hand. It was tedious work, involving application of a caustic solution and in the end using tweezers to dig it out. So I was disgusted and annoyed when I saw on my niece's hands, not one wart but several on each hand. I thought to myself, "She's going to play with my kids and give them warts, and we'll be going through the pain again."

A few days later we were with the same niece, who also happens to be our goddaughter. Her hands were clean, so I asked her how all of her warts had been removed. Since her dad is a doctor, I expected a medical explanation. Instead, she told me, "I prayed to Padre Pio one night that the warts would go away, and in the morning when I woke up, they were all gone." She said this matter-of-factly and I believed her, as did her parents and her siblings, as well as the rest of her extended family. Imagine, the alienation one would have experienced if a member of the family had said, "Unless I see the medical records documenting this inexplicable cure, I will not believe." It did not happen, but he would have been as alone as St. Thomas, the rest of the family bewildered at his inability to graciously receive so precious a gift.

For those of us who have experienced God's action in our lives, as we experienced the healing of my niece, insistent unbelief is bewildering. Insofar as we invite the doubters to believe, even as the disciples invited St. Thomas, we must recognize that we are not at fault for their alienation. The doubter cuts himself off. The doubter refuses to ask questions and through his obnoxious self-assurance ends the conversation and silences those who only wish him well.

It is then that we must remember the mercy and patience of the Lord. Just as Jesus was merciful to and patient with St. Thomas, so we must exercise the same restraint and continue to invite him into the fellowship of faith. As the doubter pulls away, it is our responsibility, like Jesus, to draw nearer and give doubting Thomas another opportunity to make the good confession.

Recall that the first words of Jesus to the disciples after He was raised from the dead were, "Peace be with you." He forgave them all for their unbelief, for their failure to believe that He did in fact have mastery over life and death, for their failure to believe that the Romans could take their bodies but not their souls. In terror they fled from Jesus when he was arrested. They had promised to die with Him, but instead they all forsook Him.

Jesus' response was to forgive them and come into their presence, to offer to them the mercy of the Lord, that they could then share this mercy with others who had fallen short of the glory of God. And after He drew near the first time, Jesus followed up with a second visit that began again with the words, "Peace be with you." His forgiveness was again first as He addressed St. Thomas directly. "Do not be faithless, but believing." Notice that Jesus is not condemnatory, though He well could have been, both on Easter Sunday and eight days later when He came a second time through closed doors to coax them out of their faithlessness. Our condemnation of those still in doubt would be counterproductive at best, when we consider the example the Lord has set before us in dealing with unbelief.

For the disciples, the hesitancy to embrace the full implication of the resurrection continued. In chapter twenty-one of St. John's gospel we have the account of Jesus' resurrection appearance on the beach. St. Peter had led the disciples back to their old way of life instead of leading them out as missionaries. Again Jesus came to them and assured them of His love. His patience, over and over again, is the model for us as we address those hesitant to believe.

The disciples' alienation from society at large represented their alienation from God. As they became secure in the truth of the resurrection, as they became secure in the truth that they were indeed forgiven, they summoned the courage to become the fishers of men Jesus promised He would make them. They could not be missionaries until they were convinced of God's love for them and, by extension, His love for all the others who were complicit in His crucifixion. And when they finally shared the Gospel after Pentecost, the disciples were patient, as the Lord had been patient with them.

It's okay, then, if we fall silent in the face of insistent unbelief. It is not okay if we do not patiently endure such doubt, nor is it okay if we do not return, as Jesus did, to continue to give encouragement, present the truth in charity, and remind our brothers and sisters of the community that issues from the forgiveness Jesus first offered to His apostles. In time, some of those who begin in doubt will confess with St. Thomas, "My Lord and my God."