

Homily for Easter II (Low Sunday) – 2022

My Lord and my God.

Every year on this day, the Octave Day of Easter or Low Sunday, as its often called, we hear St John's account of Christ's appearance to Thomas, doubting Thomas as he's known. The narrative is so familiar it hardly needs any repetition by me from the pulpit.

What is, perhaps, not so well known is that this episode, in many respects, is the final high point, the climax, of the whole of St John's gospel. Another chapter follows, a particularly beautiful one and inspiring one it is too, with its superb story of the Risen Lord appearing to the disciples on the shore of the sea of Galilee. However, it is clearly an addendum, if you like, added by St John to further illustrate the reality of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Why do I say that Our Lord's appearance to Thomas is the climax of St John's gospel? To answer that we must go back to chapter one of his book to the Prologue and specifically to verse 14 where John says of Jesus: "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen His glory, the glory as of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.*" What magnificent words and so beautifully familiar to those who 3 times daily recite the Angelus in honour of Christ's incarnation. John goes on to conclude his prologue saying (v16-18) .. "*From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The Law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.*"

Immediately, John proceeds to tell his story. It is the story of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, revealing His glory to His disciples and to the world. It is the story of Jesus Christ reaching His great hour of glorification on the cross and, in His mighty resurrection, showing the triumph of God over sin and death. As an aside, I urge you to read and re-read, when it becomes available, Fr Bob Derrenbacker's very fine sermon that he preached here on Good Friday, where he made this point so eloquently and forcefully.

St John's gospel is written to reveal the great truth that in Jesus Christ the

fullness of divinity dwells and that in His glorification on the cross, His descent to the dwelling place of the dead and by His mighty resurrection, He has inaugurated a new age. It is the age of grace, in which you and I, dear people, as sons and daughters of the household of the church, have full membership.

How is Our Lord's appearance to Thomas the climax of all of that? Well, as we all know, Thomas was absent the week before and he refused to believe the testimony of the other disciples who told him that the risen Lord had appeared to them in the upper room and showed them His hands and His side as clear proof of the reality of who it was who stood before them.

Today's gospel is yet another demonstration of the graciousness of our Saviour, who without a word of condemnation or reproof, at his second appearance 8 days later, invited Thomas to... “*Put your finger here, and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.*” (John 20:27)

There is nothing to suggest that Thomas actually did put his hand into our Lord's wounded side, but it is his profession of faith that marks the first part of the great climax of St John's gospel when he says... “*My Lord and my God!*” Only 5 words - but they summarise perfectly the faith of every believer... Jesus Christ is My Lord and my God!

But wait, there's more ... it is us and every single person like us, who has not actually seen the risen Lord or had any opportunity to physically inspect His five wounds, the trophies of His saving passion, who Jesus addresses when He says ... Thomas, “*Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.*” The climax of St Johns Gospel part 2... Blessed are those who have not seen but who come to believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and God!”

The climax part 3 is John's brilliant summary of the whole intent of his writing (John 20:31) ...This book...“*has been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that through him you may have life in his name.*”

Dear faithful people, the 4 gospels are not set out so they give what we would call a full biographical and historical account of the life of Jesus Christ. We certainly

do know more about Jesus than we do of any other figure of ancient history from their pages, nevertheless, they are primarily appeals to the reader to take Jesus as Saviour, Master and Lord. To read them only as history and biography is to approach them in the wrong spirit. We must read them, not primarily as historians seeking information, despite the clear evidence that, overwhelmingly, they are factual. They are to be read as men and women earnestly seeking God, for in their pages Jesus Christ is revealed as the incarnation of God in whom the fullness of God truly is to be found. He truly is, as St Thomas says both Lord and God!

Billy Graham puts it this way: “*Jesus Christ is God in human form and the story of His life, death and resurrection is the only Good News the world will ever hear.*”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the courageous German Lutheran who was most cruelly martyred by Hitler in 1945 said... “*If Jesus Christ is not true God, how could he help us? If He is not true man, how could he help us?*”

The great New Zealand evangelist, Jonathan Oswald Sanders says... “*The deity of Christ is the key of the scriptures. Reject it and the Bible becomes a jumble of words without any unifying theme. Accept it, and the Bible becomes an intelligible and ordered revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ.*”

My inspiration and muse, William Barclay, says... “*To see what God is like, we must look at Jesus. He perfectly represents God to men in a form which they can see and know and understand.*”

The whole point of St John’s gospel is to be found perfectly summarised in Thomas’s five word confession of faith about who Jesus is... “*My Lord and my God.*”

Many of you may have been taught to say those five words, as I have been, twice at every Mass. We say them at the elevation of the Sacred Host and at the elevation of the Chalice during the prayer of consecration, for it is the risen Lord who is truly present body, blood, soul and divinity in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

On that point, that is, the living presence of Jesus in the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, perhaps the most compelling and ancient testimony to the faith of the early church in that regard is given by St Cyril of Jerusalem way back in the middle of the

4th century. We are right back to the time when the Canon of Scripture itself had not been finalised by the church. In his Instructions to the newly baptised, take careful note everyone who is baptised, St Cyril has this to say: “*Since Christ himself clearly described the bread to us in the words “This is my Body” who will dare henceforth to dispute it? And since He has emphatically said, “This is my blood”, who will waver in the slightest and say it is not his blood? So let us partake with the fullest confidence that it is the body and blood of Christ.*” Magnificent words indeed, and uttered approximately 1200 years before the errors of the Reformation sadly reduced to something more like an insipid memorial, what is the most powerful meeting the faithful have with the risen Lord Jesus Christ, that is: in the celebration of Holy Mass and the reception of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in Holy Communion.

Today, we could all honour St John and St Thomas and honour our Risen Lord by saying those five words.. “*My Lord and my God*” ... at the elevation of both the Sacred Host and the Saving Chalice. Say them again, the moment before we receive Holy Communion and humbly ask the Lord for grace to help us to read the gospels with the eyes of faith, so that sincerely believing that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, we may have life in His name.