

2020 2nd SUNDAY OF EASTER

In our Parish here in Gisborne we are blessed to have at least five families who have come to us from the State of Kerala in India. They enrich us with their lively faith and open-hearted warmth. In India they were part of the Syro-Malaba Catholic Church which has a wonderfully unique way of celebrating Mass- going all the way back to the 1st century. These beloved parishioners, if asked, call themselves 'St. Thomas Christians' because they can trace their faith to the evangelistic activities of St. Thomas, the Apostle, who came to their land in 62AD and worked to establish the Faith there until his martyrdom in 72AD.

In the days of the Apostles a trip to India would have been long and fraught with danger. And then to live among a people of a totally different culture, who spoke a language which would have been utterly foreign, would have been very, very confusing. The life must have been enormously lonely. Yet St. Thomas faced these challenges and obviously had some success.

What gave St. Thomas this fortitude? Remember how timid Thomas had been on Holy Thursday evening. In a state of panic he had deserted his Master after the harrowing arrest in the Garden. Next day he had not been in the crowd to shout in Jesus' defence before Pilate. He had not been there to take the Cross instead of Simon of Cyrene. It was the Pharisees, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who had buried Jesus. And on the evening of Easter, Thomas had not joined the apostles to give his support to them. As a result he had missed out on being present when the Risen Lord had first appeared to them.

And when Thomas had finally shown up and had been greeted with the news that Jesus had risen and had appeared among them, he had dismissed what his fellow apostles had said as stupid hysteria.

Yet a few years later this same Thomas was in India fearlessly proclaiming that Jesus had risen from the dead- that Jesus was in truth the Eternal God.

What had happened? People don't change dramatically like this without a mighty impetus!

In today's Gospel we heard what happened. Eight days after Jesus' first appearance, Thomas- the Doubter- met the Risen Lord face to face. At the Lord's command, Thomas placed his fingers in the wounds in Jesus' hands and

feet. He put his hand into the horrendous gash in Our Lord's side. He could no longer doubt. He knelt and proclaimed "You are my Lord and my God." The Lord's resurrection was a physical fact.

From that time on, Thomas was filled with a sense of Mission- to preach, to proclaim the Good News of Jesus' saving life, death and resurrection and to bring all people into a relationship with the Lord.

The change brought about in Thomas that day gave him the impetus to take the news of the Master's Resurrection to India- a place certainly seen by Israelites to be at the very ends of the earth. Because the news that God had lived among us and died to bring us into union with Him was for everyone in the world to know about.

When we consider the change in Thomas we know that the Resurrection was a fact. It happened. It was not a myth. A myth is a story which is not historically true but contains a valuable moral truth and is to be enjoyed because of that. But the resurrection of the Lord is far more than a myth. People do not give up their lives for myths. People do not die for myths. The resurrection of Jesus has a grab you by the shoulders and shake you quality. It was like an explosion in the heart of Thomas. From the moment Thomas met the Risen Lord he felt compelled to tell the world that God the Father had intervened in human history to raise Jesus from the dead as a sign that Jesus was Who He said He was; that during His days on Earth He had spoken and acted in the Person of God. The Resurrection was the ultimate ratification of Jesus' claim that He was God.

Thomas would never forget that tender moment when he had held the wounded Hands and Feet of Jesus. The wounds of Christ are an everlasting reminder of what Jesus did to redeem us. Jesus blamed no one. When He first met the apostles after the Resurrection, He simply said "Shalom".

We killed God and God's response was to forgive. That is why this Sunday is called 'Divine Mercy Sunday'.

We are an Easter people. We rejoice that Jesus is our Lord and our God. We rejoice that through Jesus' death and resurrection, our sins have been forgiven and that we have been brought into an eternal love relationship with our God. We rejoice because we know that our King is alive and lives within each one of us. And, like Thomas, we respond to God's love and do our very best to love our King with all of our being and to bring His love to all we meet.

