

## Divine Mercy Sunday

Love and Presence

April 08, 2018

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Why does Jesus appear to his disciples after Easter? He could have spoken to them like his Father had spoken to him at his baptism, as a disembodied voice from the heavens. But he didn't. Rather he returned in the flesh. Why? Today's story of Thomas gives us a clue. Thomas was absent the day Jesus had first appeared to the disciples. He would not be satisfied with the word of others that Jesus was indeed alive. Thomas would have to see Jesus for himself, Thomas would need to touch Jesus' hands and side for himself to believe that Jesus was not still dead and buried.

Now we have always associated Thomas' reluctance to believe the others word with doubt. But I like to think it was rather an expression of the depth of Thomas' own love for Jesus. After all, we are told that Thomas means "twin". Why are we told that? Whose twin was he? Tradition has it that he so resembled Jesus himself in appearance and demeanor that he could have been Jesus own twin double. I like to think then that Thomas was so inconsolable at his death, and so guilty at his own abandonment of him, that nothing short of seeing Jesus with his own eyes and touching Jesus wounds' with his own hands could console his grief or relieve his remorse.

Love and presence--these belong together. This is one thing these resurrection appearances in the gospel have to teach us, or better, to remind us, for its not that we don't already know, but we do need reminding. That where love is strong, mere words will never be enough. But when love is strong, sheer presence can work miracles. When we are frightened or sorrowful, when we feel like hiding and withdrawing into ourselves, we need to remember that what we really need is the presence of those who love us. And when those we love are fearful or dejected and we feel helpless because we don't know what to say or what we can do , we need to think back to those cowering disciples, and remember that our mere presence, our simply being there is more powerful than anything we could ever say or do.

Love builds. It builds community as we see in today's first reading. Once Jesus appears, the disciples devote themselves to one another as well, pooling resources, breaking bread together, both literally and liturgically. They were

awed by the new spirit in which they lived, wonders were worked through the faith Jesus' resurrection had bore within them and amongst them. And their hearts were filled with gratitude.

Gratitude may be the essence of a mature faith. For gratitude means that we take what we have as a gift, or in religious terms, as grace. Hearts filled with gratitude sees all as grace. And hearts filled with gratitude are inspired to respond in kind, to give freely what has been freely given—Paul's very definition of the calling of a disciple.

The presence of Jesus transforms fear and guilt into love and gratitude. It is for this that God does not simply command from the heavens, but takes on flesh in the incarnation and returns in the flesh in the resurrection. May God's word become flesh once more in our own lives too, and may we have eyes to see the word made flesh in the presence of one another.