

Homily for the Feast of St. Thomas

July 3, 2006

by S. Mary Mark Schoenstein, OP

Poor Thomas! He is forever remembered as "doubting Thomas." We know this gospel story so well. He had been called by Jesus to be one of his apostles. He was one of the "chosen group".

Yet on this wonderful occasion when Jesus first comes, after his death and resurrection, to show himself to his "chosen friends", Thomas is not with them. We do not know why he is missing, but his absence from the group -- the body of believers -- becomes significant.

When he returns to the group they excitedly tell him: "We have seen the Lord!" But their excitement and joy is not just that they have seen Jesus again, but rather that now they see him as he truly is, the Lord of Life, the Victor over death!

Naturally Thomas is disappointed and gives his now-famous reply: "Unless I see the marks of the nails in his hands, etc. etc. I will not believe."

Jesus, ever the Compassionate One, shows himself again to his gathered friends and this time Thomas, who IS with them, is invited by Jesus to assuage his doubts by actually touching his wounds. Thomas recognizes the man, Jesus, in the flesh, but he now indeed sees much more. He recognizes Jesus as the Christ of God and falls to his knees in adoration crying out: "My Lord, AND MY GOD!"

We know Jesus' reply: "Thomas, have you come to believe because you have SEEN me (in the flesh, that it is truly I?) Blessed are those who have not seen, but believe (those who do not see me in the flesh, but who believe that I live and am still with them.) BLESSED ARE THEY." Today we read in Paul's letter to the Ephesians that we, "the fellow-citizens with all the holy ones" grow into a "dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

It is this profound mystery --- that in this body of believers --- this community we call CHURCH ---in our Congregational gathering --- "WE have seen the Lord." --- WE have experienced the Lord --- and WE BELIEVE! That is --- we believe that he lives --- is incarnated in our midst. We, by the power of God's overflowing Spirit, are now his Mystical Body -- the "dwelling place of God." In light of all we have shared these past few days, did we not rightly sing: "We walk by FAITH and not by sight"? It is this profound mystery, this truth of our faith, that we long to communicate --- as did that first group of Apostles --- through OUR teaching and preaching. For this reason we struggle to keep our schools, not just open, but alive and vibrant with the proclamation of Christ's living presence among us. And even for those who may never come to our schools --- who may only "see" the person of God as it were, in the beauty of God's creation -- we strive to preserve that presence by our reverent care of creation and all God's creatures.

So in this Eucharist, we celebrate once again the mystery of our living, incarnate God, and surrender ourselves to participation in God's work of bringing life to the world more abundantly. As we proclaimed in our responsorial psalm today: "Go out to all the world and tell the GOOD NEWS." HOW blest we are!