

## Second Sunday of Easter

Year A

Acts 2:42-47

Ps 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

I Pt 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

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Bad timing: It's not the worst thing that can happen to you, but it's frustrating. Most of us have had the experience of being just a little bit late for something important or exciting or beautiful. It's more than disappointing: it's aggravating, because often there is someone who is going on and on about what we missed, someone who, we suspect, is purposely rubbing it in. You can tell, because this person will use the words "just" and "most" in every description of what happened. "You just missed the most hysterical joke!" "You just missed the most beautiful sunset!" "You just missed the most incredible play of the game!" "You just missed the most delicious meal!"

Jesus is dead. The apostles ran, left Jesus to die, and now hide in a locked room. Thomas can't take it anymore. They've been cooped up for days, no one's had a bath or a good night's sleep, everyone keeps rehashing what happened, going over it again and again: "How could we abandon our friend? Why did we do it? How could we do it? What is going to happen to us?" Thomas finally snaps. He stands up, gives the other ten a sharp look and says, "I have had enough of all of you. I am *out* of here!", turns the lock, pulls the door, and walks back into the world. For the first time in days, he strolls down the street, feels the sun, says hello to a couple people. His blood gets flowing, he stops at a well and splashes water on his face, he has a hot meal. He sees that the world hasn't ended, life is going on, perhaps everything that happened wasn't that bad after all. His shame gives way to the great satisfaction of stretching his legs, and the greater satisfaction of knowing that he alone had the guts to leave the dreary safety of the apostles' hiding place. He feels great.

And when he gets back, ready to answer breathless questions, ready to hear some applause, ready to be admired, this is what greets him instead: "You *just* missed Jesus."

It's probably James who breaks the news. Thomas knows he isn't kidding, because James, although a nice guy, doesn't have much of a sense of humor. Thomas looks around. Peter is just staring off into space, as if he's a million miles away. John and Matthew and Jude are giggling the way they do when they've had too much wine. Philip looks like he's been crying. Andrew, with a slight smirk on his face, rushes up and says, "Thomas, you should have been here! He forgave us for abandoning him! He breathed the Holy Spirit on us! It was the *most* amazing thing that ever happened!"

So perhaps, when Thomas declares, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe," it's more out of anger and frustration than outright disbelief. He has gone from feeling brave and happy to being told that he missed his chance to see the risen Lord. The regret is too great, the disappointment too intense. Who among us can not sympathize with Thomas and his world-class case of bad timing?

During the week that followed, Thomas must have felt at a real disadvantage. The other apostles do nothing but talk about Jesus' appearance, reminding Thomas of what he missed,

rubbing in his disappointment and resentment. Simon the Zealot, trying to make Thomas feel better, says, "Oh, don't worry Thomas. I'm sure the Lord will appear again. You'll get your chance to see him" But Thomas isn't consoled. Yes, Jesus may appear again - but that won't change the fact that the first time, the *first* time the risen Lord appeared, he missed him. Thomas already sees where this is headed. For as long as men and women follow Christ, the story will be told the same way: "The apostles were in the locked room, terrified. They had no hope, no future. Then Jesus walked right through the door and spoke to them, and gave them his peace, and filled them with his Spirit. He was no longer dead, he was alive! The apostles were overjoyed! Oh, yeah - and Thomas was out at the time."

But that is not our story. Jesus says to Thomas, and to us, "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." Jesus is clear: the apostles were blessed, and so are we; they were given great gifts, and so are we; they received the Lord's Spirit, and so do we. The apostles and the other disciples who knew the Lord and walked with him and heard him speak have no advantage over us. Indeed, they saw, but did *not* believe. They saw his face, and abandoned him to die. They heard his words, and denied they knew him. They shared his food, heard him laugh, watched him cure the sick and raise the dead and gladden the hearts of the poor; but when he needed them, all of that seeing and hearing and touching meant nothing. They saw, but they ran.

We do not see the risen Lord in the way they did, but we are just as blessed - and just as challenged. The Christ who walked through their door gives us his body and blood at this Mass. The Christ who spoke the words "Peace be with you" proclaims himself in these Scriptures. The Christ who breathed the Holy Spirit on the apostles floods our hearts with his Spirit, giving us the gift of faith by which our souls are saved. The Christ who appeared to the defeated and desperate apostles appears to us every single days of our lives in the poor, the homeless, the grief-stricken, the addicted, the foreigner, the desperate, and the lost. The Christ who sent the apostles out to proclaim his victory over sin and death sends us out to do exactly the same, that through our witness the Lord may add to the number of those who are being saved. We see this *because* we believe.

We are not Thomas. We have not just missed Christ. He is here today, in our hearts and in this church. He courses through our veins and holds these bricks together, he draws this earth around the sun and carries the rivers and seas upon his back, he buds forth in every field and sings out in the cries of the newborn washed in the waters of this font. We smell the Lord in these lilies, taste him in the clouds of incense, hear him in the popping of our joints as we kneel before this altar. He sets his foot on every road, fills every hour with eternal life, leaves no wild flower without its share of his own beauty. He weeps in those who weep, he mourns in those who mourn, he rages in those who cry out against the brutal ways of man. He is sick in the Pope, he is starving in Terry Schiavo, he is lost in those who seek their joy in wealth alone, in meaningless sex, in the numbness of liquor and drugs. He knits us together in our mothers' wombs and stands beyond the abyss of death and cries out "Peace!" and promises to carry us to safety. How could this not be so? He through whom the world was made was dead and now is raised for us. What could exist that Christ does not hold up? Where could we be that he is not?

We have not just missed Christ. It is not possible to "just" miss Christ. We have to work at it. It takes effort not to see him, not to taste him, not to hear his call. The question is not, "Where can Christ be found?" The question is, "Where can Christ not be found? Where can the Christ who burst forth from the sealed tomb and walked through the locked door and broke through the apostle's fear and shame not be found?" And when we see, because we believe, that nothing holds him back, that no corner of this vast universe and no corner of our sinful hearts is past the reach of Christ's peace, then we have seen what the apostles saw. We haven't missed a thing. Because we believe, we see the glorious Lord everywhere we turn our eyes.