

Link to YouTube recording of service <https://youtu.be/ujOIF2NG6D0>

‘Rector, I’m not sure what I believe anymore’. Many is the time I have heard that in the privacy of someone’s home. People will have come to this position for a number of reasons. It could be the trauma of bereavement, or serious illness in themselves or someone they love, some natural disaster leaving many innocents suffering or dead. Or just simply the spark has gone out of living.

Then of course there is the present crisis we are now going through; a crisis we never imagined just 6 months ago, that has sent shock waves through the whole world. This virus has taken its toll in so many ways. We wait each night to hear the death toll, the number of new infections, the number in our ICU units. Our community and family life is now at a distance. People are worried, worried sick about employment, about businesses, about loved ones; our young people are worried about their Leaving Cert, their progress to 3rd level or training. We can’t move beyond our immediate neighbourhoods. We’ve lost control. We don’t know what, who to believe anymore.

We have read the Gospel reading appointed for today, the 2nd Sunday of Easter. In this we’ve continued our reading of the account of that first Easter Day as told to us by John. We find the disciples on that first Easter evening, still in hiding. The discovery of the empty tomb that morning just seemed to confound the misery of their memories of watching at a distance as Jesus dies, powerless to help. The talk of the women of seeing him alive just adds to their confusion. Then, as we read today, they have their own meeting, their own

encounter with the Risen Jesus; they see, they hear, they feel his breath. They were glad when they saw the Lord.

Except they weren't all there. For some reason Thomas wasn't there. We're not told why. Maybe, hurt and confused, he had gone off to be by himself, with his own thoughts, his own sadness.

When he comes back, the mood in the room had changed. There is excitement as they tell him what they have seen and heard; 'We have seen the Lord!'

Poor Thomas. He wants, desperately wants, to believe but he can't.

'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

John 20:25

It can be very hard to speak of doubt and uncertainty in the Church. We can feel very alone; that loneliness can be heightened by a feeling of guilt. What's wrong with me? We in the Church can feel threatened by others who express doubt or difficulties with faith – we are afraid that their questions can undermine our certainties.

So let us think of that group of disciples who gathered a week after the resurrection. This time Thomas is there with the rest. I think there is a valuable lesson for us all that Thomas is there; he is still part of the fellowship. He has not been side-lined as one who undermined their faith. Into this group made up of the committed and the doubtful comes the risen Christ. Once again, he greets them; 'Peace be with you'. As to the other disciples on that

first night, he shows Thomas his hands and his side and brings him from doubt to faith, to his own confession of faith, ‘My Lord and my God’. Now he has had his own experience of the risen Christ, now he has had his own Easter experience. I often say that Easter came a week later for Thomas but it did come. He had a week of mental and spiritual turmoil, but his faith in the risen Christ is just as real, just as sure as that of his fellow disciples.

This episode has a number of important lessons for us both as individuals and as a community. We are a very varied group of people; different ages, different occupations, different temperaments, each with our own strengths and weaknesses. But we share this in common; we are all on a spiritual journey, each at different stages on that journey. Some are just setting out, some are well advanced, with a firm confidence in Christ – others at different stages in between. And we are a community, we are not just a collection of individuals before God, interested only in ourselves. We have a responsibility to, and for each other. Thomas’ doubt, his honest, heartfelt agonising doubt did not isolate him from his fellow disciples.

We are all finding the present circumstances hard in different ways. It is hard being a child, not understanding why they can’t go out to play with friends. It is hard being a parent, it is hard being cocooned. But then it is hard being a health worker, doctor, nurse, support staff in our hospitals and nursing homes. It is hard being a garda, feeling the brunt of the frustration of people who feel that rules apply to everyone else but not to them.

We are a community and we will get through this by being a community, understanding one another, supporting one another, just being there for one another.