

Homily based on the readings from April 7, 2024 (Acts 4.32-35; 1 John 5.1-6; John 20.19-31)

Most of us here this [morning/evening] probably remember the day that Pope Saint John Paul II passed away. As you may recall, he died on Saturday, April 2, 2005 – the weekend of Divine Mercy Sunday. The Gospel for that Sunday was exactly the one we just heard – the encounter of the Apostle Thomas with the Resurrected Christ.

Like most of you, I have heard so many homilies over the years that I rarely remember the details of *any* of them. I will never forget the homily from that Sunday morning, though. My pastor at the time, Monsignor Thomas Bride, told us about the first time he had the opportunity to meet the Holy Father. As a young priest, he had been scheduled to have an audience with Pope Saint Paul VI – who passed away before the meeting could take place. The meeting was then rescheduled with Blessed John Paul I, who passed away only 33 days after his election. After months of waiting, young Father Thomas finally

got the chance to meet the newly-elected John Paul II. When introducing him to the Holy Father, Bishop Reilly explained that Father Thomas had been worried that he would never actually get to meet the Pope. The Holy Father looked Father Thomas directly in the eye, pointed at him, and said: “You must *believe*, Thomas.”

The Apostle Thomas – *Doubting Thomas*, as he is sometimes called – is often criticized because of his skepticism about Christ’s Resurrection. Although there is *some* validity to that criticism, there is also a certain degree of unfairness. Since he had been absent from the gathering at which Jesus had previously appeared, how could he have the same perspective as someone who had already encountered the Risen Christ personally? Would any of the other apostles – would any of us – have been *more* likely to believe somebody else’s account of such an extraordinary event? The Gospel also does not say whether Thomas *actually* took the opportunity to touch the wounds of Christ. Jesus appeared and invited Thomas to do so, at which point Thomas uttered his immortal words: “My Lord and my God!”

The New Testament records only three conversations specifically involving Saint Thomas – all of which appear within the Gospel of John. The last of the three is the interaction we heard in today’s Gospel. The first, just a few chapters earlier, tells us a great deal about Thomas’s character. As you may recall, Lazarus – the brother of Mary and Martha – had died, and Jesus proposed to visit the family in their hometown of Bethany. The other disciples urged Jesus not to go, knowing that the residents of that country wanted to kill him. Thomas had an entirely different response: “Let us also go, that we may *die* with him.” Thomas, alone among the disciples at this point, demonstrated both courage and realism. He clearly understood the consequences of following Christ, without any self-deception or wishful thinking, yet he stayed with Jesus out of loyalty and devotion – and perhaps a certain degree of stubbornness.

It is precisely that *absence* of wishful thinking that we see in today’s Gospel. It would have been *easy* for Thomas just to go along with the

crowd and pretend to believe that Jesus had come back from the dead.

That was not Thomas's way. He had no interest in taking the *easy* path, but was committed to following the *truth* – wherever it would lead him. He did not know what the truth *was* until Christ spoke to him directly.

Once Thomas finally recognizes Jesus, his recognition is complete: “My Lord and my God!” No other character, appearing in any of the four Gospels, proclaims the *divinity* of Christ so clearly. Others refer to Jesus as the *Son of God* or the *Lamb of God* or the *Christ of God* or the *Holy One of God*. Nobody else, besides Saint Thomas, simply calls him *God*. Thomas's recognition of Jesus may have been delayed by stubbornness and pessimism, but – when it finally came – it reflected a profound and unshakeable understanding of Christ's inmost nature.

While every Christian comes to belief in Christ through his own unique set of experiences, there is one lesson that we can *all* take from the Apostle Thomas. Authentic belief in Christ is not the result of following what is *popular*, but of holding fast to what is *true*. There have been

periods of time, in this country and elsewhere, when being Christian was advantageous – or even necessary – to achieving worldly success.

Those days are long gone. Being a Christian today is definitely not *easy*, but it is still *true*. Now, more than ever, we all need the courage, the loyalty, and even the stubbornness of Thomas.

On this day, as we continue our celebration of Christ's Resurrection, the words of Saint Thomas should be echoing in our ears: "My Lord and my God!" Even though the circumstances have changed, Christ still appears to his assembled disciples. Every time we gather around the altar for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, *he* becomes present – just as he did to Thomas and the other Apostles. The Jesus we receive in the Holy Eucharist is the *same* Jesus who died for us on the Cross and who rose again in glory. *Our* job – the job of every Christian – is simply to recognize him for who he truly *is*.