

Homily for the Second Sunday of Easter, Year C

April 27, 2025

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

First Reading: Acts 5:12-16 (The apostles worked many signs as they proclaimed the Risen Christ.)

Responsory: Psalm 118 (Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.)

Second Reading: Revelation 1:9-13, 17-19 (I am the first and the last, the one who lives.)

Gospel: John 20:19-31 (Doubting Thomas.)

The four gospels in the New Testament provide us with many inspiring eyewitness accounts of the Risen Jesus, but they leave us with a rather confused picture of how those stories fit together. For example, the authors agree that Jesus met at least once with his eleven remaining apostles, but they disagree about the timing and location of the gathering. In addition, there are a number of stories about Jesus' encounters with other people, like the women at the tomb or the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. But, again, the details vary quite a bit, and the stories contradict one another. As a result, we can be sure that the Risen Jesus appeared a number of times, but it's impossible to piece together a coherent timeline of where, when and to whom he appeared. One common theme that emerges from *all* of the stories, however, is that many people found it very difficult to believe that Jesus was really alive, until that had actually seen him in the flesh.

That's why I think it's unfair to label Thomas as, "the apostle who doubted the Resurrection," as if the others didn't. Let's face it, *they all doubted*, and why wouldn't they? In the history of the world, no one had ever been raised up from the dead like Jesus. A few people had been brought back to life by prophets, including by Jesus himself, but that was different. Those other people had simply resumed their earthly lives, only to die again later on. When Jesus came back to life, he rose victorious from the tomb, never to die again. From the gospel accounts, it seems that he possessed a new type of glorified body, which still bore the marks of his crucifixion, but which was free from our normal bodily limitations. For example, he could appear and disappear at will, and shield his identity even from people who knew him well. Nevertheless, once people saw Jesus for themselves, they believed, and they *testified* to that belief. In fact, Thomas offered the most powerful testimony of all, addressing Jesus as, "My Lord and my God!"

The daunting task set before the Apostles was to proclaim not only that Jesus had risen, but that he also was the Son of God and the Savior of the world. And, they had to proclaim that truth to people who *had not seen the Risen Lord*. Jesus' comment to Thomas – "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed" – is often interpreted as a criticism of Thomas. But, it just as easily could be interpreted as a sign of hope that the gospel message *would be heard and believed*. In fact, as the Good News of Jesus Christ spread, many were astounded at how readily people who never met Jesus and did not even believe in the God of Israel could come to believe in the Risen Christ and accept him as their Lord and Savior.

The Acts of the Apostles says that many signs and wonders accompanied the Apostles' preaching. Many probably came to believe their message because they saw the Apostles curing people of their illnesses by invoking the name of Jesus. Still, those demonstrations of divine power *alone* cannot account for the dramatic growth of the Church, nor for its longevity up until the present day. The successful evangelization of the whole world required, *and still requires*, a confluence of divine and human factors.

In addition to convincing his disciples that he was alive and well, Jesus had to *open their minds* to understand God's salvific plan. It was not enough for them to go out and proclaim Jesus risen from the dead. They had to explain *why* he died and *what he had accomplished* by his death. While we didn't hear that aspect of the Apostles' preaching in today's first reading, the Acts of the Apostles contains many passages which show the Apostles explaining in detail how the Scriptures testified to Jesus and have been fulfilled by his death and resurrection. Hence, their preaching was only *partly* eyewitness testimony to a particular event. The real substance of their message was the *revelation* that Jesus' resurrection had brought to light. That is still true of the Church's teaching today. We proclaim Christ's death and resurrection not just as an historical event, but as the joy and hope of all the world. For, as we say in the Easter Preface, "by dying he has destroyed our death, and by rising he has restored our life." His sacrifice on the cross was not just a moment in time, but the culmination of everything that had come before, and the foundation for everything that would come after him.

This is the divine revelation that we believe and proclaim. Like the Apostles, we must proclaim it with *human* voices, utilizing our human gifts, and sometimes hampered by our human limitations. That's why we can take such inspiration from the Apostles' initial struggles, followed by their later success. Eyewitness testimony from others was not enough to convince any of them, yet they *became* the eyewitnesses who convinced the world. When they encountered skepticism, I imagine that they responded, "Hey, I doubted, too, until I saw him with my own eyes." The apostles' compassionate understanding of other people's doubts only *strengthened* their ability to evangelize. In order to reach people, we need to understand where they're coming from, and know how to meet them where they are. The Apostles knew that their listeners did not believe that it was possible for any man to rise from the dead. That was their starting point, and the first obstacle to be overcome. We modern-day apostles need to recognize a *different* reality – that many of our contemporaries, including many practicing Catholics, do not believe that an *intimate relationship with the Risen Lord* is possible. That is *their* starting point, and the first obstacle to be overcome.

We who have known intimacy with Christ need to find ways to share that experience. It helps to remember and examine the times when *we* tried to push Jesus to the periphery of our lives and keep him there. Why did *we* feel a need to hide from him, or to keep him at arm's length? Maybe we felt ashamed of ourselves. Or, conversely, maybe we thought too much of ourselves, and failed to recognize our need for Christ's love. Maybe we were grieving a loss and were afraid to admit that we were angry with God. Or, maybe we just had never learned how to open our heart to the Lord in prayer. Others share these struggles with us. When we listen to *their experience*, we may find that they can also share *our faith* and *our love* for Christ.