



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title: **"Welcoming Thomas Back In"**
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Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Acts 5: 12a, 17-22, 25-29
Second Reading Revelation 1: 9-19
Gospel John 20: 19-31

During the Middle Ages, Lent was such an awful experience that the entire season of Easter that followed was full of entertainment, fun and recreation. There are even accounts of senior monks in the monasteries cracking jokes on purpose during greater silence and other solemn occasions just to make the novices break up. Now I'm not going to do that today, but I *am* giving you the "Low Sunday" treat of a short sermon in order to add to your Easter joy.

In today's first reading, which like most of our opening lections during this season is from the book of Acts, the brand-new Christian movement is described using a strange word. It isn't called "a church" or a "sect" or a "philosophy." Instead, when an angel is said to come and free the apostles from prison, this heavenly messenger says, "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of *this (new) Life.*" This *Life!* It's a powerful image of the new way of not only seeing, but living the Gospel truth: that because God became a human being in Jesus, and because that human being died and rose again, nothing needs to be the same again: to our comfort and our challenge. It tells us that we must *live*.

There is an aspect of "this Life" that is important: it is meant to be shared- it is lived *in community*. The concept of the Christian hermit or solitary monk living alone in his cell didn't arise for centuries: the original, authentic and authorized version of the Body of Christ on earth was an organism. St. Paul loved to use the image of the body to illustrate just how interrelated we all are supposed to be. We are meant to be Christians *together*.

Today's Gospel, too, speaks of this in a way that is often forgotten. When poor Thomas makes his declaration wishing, no- *demanding* that he touch the physical body of the Risen Lord, we sometimes chide him hypocritically for his lack of faith. But try seeing the issue from his perspective and you will understand him a bit better. He is the *only* disciple listed as *unaccounted for* on Easter night, "missing in action" for the most stupendous event in human history! It is one of the great mysteries of the New Testament as to why he wasn't with the others, and why it was only he who was away. But imagine how he felt to be told what and Whom he had *missed!* No wonder he called for a second chance: for a "recount" of the symbolic number of witnesses! Wouldn't *you* feel horribly cheated to be thought of as the only disciple who missed the Resurrection?!

When Thomas is finally granted his wish and the Risen Lord Jesus appears to him a week later, it is not in the secrecy of his own room or in a quiet garden, but in the same gathering place where Jesus appeared before, and with all of the disciples present once again. The clan is gathered; the number is complete; and Thomas can now count himself as a member in good standing in the full contingent of the apostolic band. He is "brought in from the cold" to rejoin the community of Resurrection faith: those who had seen the Lord not only in His special resurrected Body, but also in the body of His people who had been transformed by "this new life" that they had found *in each other*.

So it is with us: or should be. There is nothing more inappropriate than celebrating Easter in solitude, and it is theologically suspect to think of the gifts of Christ bestowed through His return to life as being only for the *one*, and not for the *many*. Not everyone may know that, in our Anglican tradition, a priest may not celebrate Holy Communion without at least *one other person* present. Why? Because the

Eucharist is not a private 'meal for one'- even for a priest, but it is rather a communal feast celebrated by the church gathered together for "the breaking of bread and prayers."

So we continue our celebration of Easter by doing just that: we gather and we welcome new members to the family: [bringing them, thankfully "*into* the cold" rather than from it, now that our air conditioning is functional again!] But welcome them we must, because when it comes to Easter it's not just "the more the merrier", but it's also the more *Christian* as we gather here to "be" the Church: the Body of Christ with all its limbs and organs, working together on purpose and in harmony. Let us *be* that Body, and let us be it *together*.