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**Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel, NYC**  
**April 11, 2021 Streaming Mass**  
**Easter 2nd Sunday of 2014     John 20:19-31**

Today's Gospel account of "doubting Thomas" is one with which we are all familiar. It raises basic questions about what is faith, and what does Easter really mean for us. To see how faith in the risen Jesus can affect, can indeed change us, I'd like to focus on three individuals who play significant roles in the post-Resurrection stories of the Gospels. They are Mary Magdalene, Peter and Thomas. I would like to sketch three brief character studies, three vignettes, if you will, of these individuals, and show how their encounter with the risen Jesus is more than an affirmation that Jesus is indeed risen from the dead; how each of these three is really changed by that meeting; how their lives are opened up, transformed, revitalized. Each is given a new lease on life. The promise and hope of Easter is that the same can be true for each of us, that we too can have our lives expanded, enriched and given back to us in a fuller way. We can be empowered to engage life in a different way, i.e., if we are open to the healing, transforming presence of the risen Christ. That is the meaning of Jesus' words in today's Gospel, "Blessed are those who have not seen, but have believed." Even though we were not contemporaries of the risen Christ, we can still share in the power of the Resurrection.

Let's begin with Mary Magdalene. After the burial of Jesus, totally distraught about His crucifixion and death, Mary returns to His tomb to attend to the task of anointing His body. Mary seems to be the kind of person who, when under great stress, has to get her mind off things, has to keep busy, has to get lost in her work, and if that means doing something for others, then, all the better. Mary buries all her dark feelings of loss, of anger, of abandonment that threaten to overcome her by finding something to do. That way she does not have to deal with actually facing those painful emotions. Mary uses other people as an escape from her own pain, rather than confronting that pain in an honest and direct way.

So, when Mary arrives at the tomb, with her list of things to do in mind, she finds it empty. And, when she thought things could not have gotten any worse, now it appears that someone has taken away, perhaps even stolen, the body of Jesus. She sees a man whom she assumes is the gardener. She begins to question him, again trying to figure out what she has to do now. This stranger simply calls her by name, and she recognizes that this is no gardener, but actually Jesus. What Jesus has done is to call Mary back from her frenetic escape in doing for others; He calls her back to herself, back to the present moment. Then when Mary is about to embrace the feet of

Jesus, He tells her, "Do not cling to me." In a few moments we'll see how Jesus says the very opposite to Thomas, but then Thomas is a different kind of person with different needs. This is Jesus' way of telling Mary, whose life had been one of compulsively joining herself to others, perhaps even clinging to them, that now is the time for her to be alone with herself, to recognize her own needs, and not try to escape from them by dealing with the needs of others. She rushes back to the apostles to tell them that she has seen Jesus. But she returns as a different sort of person. She can continue to do for others, but no longer compulsively, frenetically. She does not have to hide behind those good deeds: she is free to be herself, because she had met the Lord of life.

Let's now look at Peter and the nature of his personality. Peter appears to be the kind of person who is ruled by his emotions. He doesn't think things through; he just does what he feels like doing. Peter comes across as being full of energy: impulsive and impetuous, bursting with pledges of love and commitment, but blind to his limitations and angry with those who don't see things his way. Peter can act cowardly one moment and be repentant the next; he can be vulnerable and vengeful; he can be furious and then overwhelmed with grief. Peter is certainly a passionate individual, but he is also highly erratic, someone whom you really can't count on when you need him, as we see in Peter's denial of Jesus three times. Someone, like Peter, who is at the mercy of their impulses is not always aware of what is going on around them. Those whose feelings dictate their actions may not even recognize what's happening to them, and, more importantly, what they are doing to others, because they live on a superficial level, disconnected from reality.

When Peter encounters the risen Jesus, three times Jesus asks, "Peter, do you love me?" Jesus is not trying to make Peter feel more guilty and ashamed by bringing up the embarrassing moment of his denial. No! Jesus is showing there is no going forward without some accountability for the past. Peter's first two affirmations of love are rather perfunctory, not really thought through. It's only the third time that Peter puts a sense of real commitment into his words, when he says "Lord, you know that I love you." What the risen Jesus has done is to draw Peter out of the emotional fog in which he had been accustomed to live his life. Jesus is demanding integrity and commitment of Peter, but what Jesus asks for He also makes possible. Peter would no longer respond to life's threats and possibilities simply as his feelings dictated. Now he is enabled to face life clear-headed, with a sense of purpose and direction.

And finally we come to Thomas in today's Gospel, who is called "The Twin." That nickname may be significant, for it sometimes happens that, with a set of twins, one twin may be overshadowed by the other. That seems to be true of Thomas, because

whatever we see him in the Gospels he usually has to share attention with whomever he is with. Thomas may be the kind of person who feels he doesn't count for that much, and so is content to remain at the periphery, at the edge of life, more as an observer than a participant, watching the world pass by, hoping to make some sense of things, trying to figure out where he belongs, but not fully engaging life.

Thomas hears the story of Jesus' return from the dead, but he refuses to believe it. He is an honest man; he is not going to pretend to believe; he demands evidence before he is willing to accept the fact that Jesus is alive. A week later the risen Jesus appears again and singles Thomas out from the crowd, and surprisingly He asks Thomas to do to Him what He had refused to allow Mary Magdalene to do. He asks Thomas to touch him. What Jesus is doing here is drawing Thomas out of himself, out of his self-imposed sense of isolation. Thomas, who was accustomed to live in his head, in his interior world of ideas and abstractions, is led by Jesus to the world of feelings and emotions—to trust with his heart.

By looking at the lives of Mary, Magdalene, Peter and Thomas, transformed, we see that to believe that Jesus is risen from the dead is more than a set of beliefs or propositions. It is to be open to the healing presence of the risen Christ, so that we can be something more than what we have been. The faith that the risen Jesus makes possible in the lives of and Mary Magdalene, Peter and Thomas is a faith that lifts them up beyond the narrow, limited, partial way in which they had been accustomed to deal with life. So, the Easter Gospel invites the person who has been cut off from their feelings to connect with them, to deal with them. It invites the person who has lived as a victim of their feelings to think things through, to see what their thoughtless actions are doing to them and to the other people in their life. It invites the person who has lived too long in the head, to leave room for the heart. An Easter faith enabled them to see there was another way, a better way of living their lives. Let us pray that we can be open to the same possibility of healing that the risen Jesus offers to us.