

Homily Fr Dispin John 19/4 2nd Sunday of Easter 2020

St John's Mitcham Victoria 3232 Australia www.stjohnsmitcham.com.au

During a visit to a Marian Pilgrim centre in the southern part of India. I encountered a very strange pilgrim at a small cafe run by the shrine. I was having a coffee with some evening snacks. From where I was sitting. I could see the pilgrims going in and coming out, people kneeling and praying, and while I was at this table, somebody else joined me at the table. After a few minutes, this gentleman in his late fifties, maybe, he began to say things like, in a very loud voice, things like, "Hey, you people, you are mad," that "God is not real." That "Mother Mary, she does not have eyes and ears and heart. Don't waste your time. Go away." And you can imagine in a shrine where people come to pray, this kind of sound is not a welcome sound. So people immediately rushed to him, tried to silence him, but I thought that this man had a story. So we then began to chat.

He told me that God was at the centre of his life and they've, together as a family, prayed the rosary every day, and that they visited this holy shrine every year together as a family. A year ago he was struck with this illness, because of which he lost his job and his family endured all sorts of problems and distress. In all of this they came and prayed in this shrine, but nothing happened. He was still struggling. His pain was still real, so he said, "Today I came by myself without my family to this place. Not to plead or pray like those mad people, but to question. To show my anger, and to say that I don't believe anymore."

Made me very sad, and we had a long chat, kept on talking, talking, talking, and strangely enough, at the end of that, we prayed. We prayed together. As I was on my way home that night, I received a text from this man, just two words. "I believe." That's what he wrote to me. "I believe." Despite his experiences, suffering, pain, and abandoned by God, he still chose to believe. He decided to place his trust in God again. Unlike Thomas in the gospel today who says that seeing is believing, this man, even though he was struggling, he still chose to believe.

I believe that there is a bit of Thomas in every one of us, but I suppose we are more like that person who did not see, but still chose to believe despite his sufferings and pain. To believe in Christ is to trust in spite of a lot of what we see and feel. The decision to believe in God in the midst of suffering and absence of God is very challenging.

Our readings today, especially the gospel, speak of Thomas who thought that his friends were mad when they said to him, "We have seen the Lord." How can he believe? Because just a few days ago, Jesus was crucified and killed, a totally helpless and a cruel death, and yet you still ask me to believe. It is sometimes not possible to believe.

Yet despite all this, today we see Jesus coming and standing in their midst and encountering their fear and turning them into peace. Maybe, it kind of reflects our situation of isolation too, these days. Remember, the disciples had locked themselves in for fear of danger out there, and Jesus knows that they are crippled and cannot go to him, so Jesus comes to them, in their midst. Remember, the doors are locked and Jesus still breaks through, and comes and stands in their midst. He breathes on them his Holy Spirit and gives them the peace that they need.

As we encounter the risen Lord. Is there any door that we are locked behind, like fear, anger, anxiety, unforgiveness, that stop us from living and being as the people that God has called us to be? Is there something that is bothering you that needs God's help? Is there a secret door that we are not opening to anybody, let alone God, but must be broken? Well, here is the good news. Even without invitation Jesus will come and break open those doors and enter and destroy those fears, and anxieties, and hatred and anger, and breathe on us his peace. And that is the message and the gift of Easter. Jesus will break open, come in and stand in front of us and say to us, "Today, this very moment, peace be with you." You don't have to live any longer behind those locked doors in your fear, in your anxiety. Jesus comes in.

Jesus, the risen Lord is a gift to us. He gives us the gift of peace, so have the courage to believe, even in spite of our own struggles, have the courage to believe, that Jesus comes to you in the midst of your fear, doubt, suffering, anger, ill health, loneliness. Jesus comes to you at this very moment. Jesus came back for his friends, because he knew they were hurting, they were lonely, they were frightened. Jesus knows you and I are hurting. We are sometimes lonely and surrounded by fear. Jesus loves you and he will come for you. He will break open any doors that we may be hiding behind because of our circumstances. Jesus is coming for you and me, and so may the peace of Christ, the risen Lord, give each one of us healing, comfort, strength, courage, and all that we need at this very moment to live our life to the full.

As we encounter the Easter joy may the risen Lord bless every one of us. May the risen Lord reign in our hearts. Hallelujah.