

The story of Doubting Thomas tells us that seeing is believing, right? Or is it in believing that we really see? Maybe it's both. What do you think? Let's take a look and you can decide for yourself. Scholars believe the story was written in response to conflicts in the early Church over the nature of Jesus Christ. Was he truly God, they wondered, just a man, or somehow completely both, the way we say he is when we pray the Creed together each Sunday.

That whole story is complex and spans centuries, but to net it out we can say that on the one hand, there were those who claimed that Jesus was a pretty good guy, but not God. This heresy remains alive and well even in our time. At the other end of the spectrum were folks who said Jesus was pure spirit, and only looked like a human being. This heresy is still around, too. You hear about it from folks who say Jesus really didn't have to grow and suffer like the rest of us, even though Scripture clearly says he did.

The story of Doubting Thomas gave the evangelists an opportunity to point out concretely that the resurrected Jesus had a fully human body that Thomas could see and touch. Crucially, the resurrected body that Thomas touched still bore the wounds of Jesus' Passion. Not only that, but Thomas was not asked to touch Jesus' elbow or foot, but to explore those wounds. There's a reason for that. Let me explain with a story.

My friend Ernie told me of a time he and his family had gone to a Christian church not too far from here to attend a friend's wedding. His daughter, Alice, looked around the church before the wedding began and asked her dad: "How come there's no body on the cross?" "Oh," Ernie replied, "our friends don't have a body on the cross as a way of expressing their belief that in his Resurrection, Jesus conquered death and isn't there anymore." "Why don't we do that, too?" Alice wanted to know. "We believe people have to see the whole story, Alice," Ernie explained. "The suffering and death of Jesus as well as his resurrection. If we don't do that, it'd be like me telling you that

the complete story of Cinderella is just ‘...then they all lived happily ever after’ and not telling you about the struggles that led up to the triumph of love and a happy ending.”

“So where did they hide the body?” Alice asked.

“It’s hidden within our hearts, I think they’d say,” Ernie responded.

“How is that different from what we believe?” Alice wanted to know.

“It’s similar,” Ernie said, “but you need to grasp the amazing gift of the Eucharist to appreciate the depth of the difference. We believe that the Eucharist is the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ; his real, and entire presence.”

“And they don’t believe that?” Alice asked.

“Nope,” Ernie said. “They believe it has only symbolic value. That’s why we respectfully decline to accept communion from them and ask that they do likewise when they visit us.”

“What’s wrong with looking at the Eucharist as just as a symbol?” Alice asked.

“It’s like this,” Ernie explained. “You’re wearing a nice dress right now, aren’t you?”

“Glad you like it,” Alice replied.

“Suppose I suddenly said you’re not really a girl wearing that dress, but just a dressed-up mannikin that looks a bit like a girl,” Ernie said.

“That would be weird, Dad,” Alice replied.

“You bet it would,” Ernie agreed. “Even though I might admire the dress and say nice things about it, I’d be denying something very important about the reality of you being inside that dress. Misunderstanding the Eucharist would be a little like that.”

“There’s more too, Alice,” Ernie continued. “Remember that story about Doubting Thomas?”

“I sure do, Dad,” Alice said. “Poor guy. Being remembered for all time like that.”

“There’s more to the story than just the doubting part, Alice,” Ernie said. “It seems that if we want to believe in Jesus, we have to be willing to explore his wounds.”

“That sounds gross, Dad,” Alice said “What do you mean?”

“When Jesus appeared to Thomas,” Ernie continued. “he asked him specifically to touch his wounds. Why do you think he did that?”

“I don’t know,” Alice replied. “maybe it was just that then he’d know for sure it was really him.”

“True enough,” Ernie said, “but there’s something else, too. In touching Jesus’ wounds, Thomas was being asked to examine the realities expressed within his suffering. Jesus didn’t put those wounds there by himself. He had a lot of help from us. We humans wound not only Christ himself, but also ourselves and one another. Like Thomas, we’re being asked to observe, acknowledge and enter into that very visible reality.”

“Why would Jesus want us to do that?” Alice asked.

“Nobody’s recommending that we all go out and suffer,” Ernie replied, “but suffering endured in the awareness of God’s presence can bring with it a depth of faith that cannot be acquired in any other way; wisdom of a kind that can never come from any initiative of our own, but can only be given to us as we share our suffering with God. Another famous rabbi put it this way: ‘A man who hasn’t suffered – what does he know?’ I think it’s so that we come to know beyond any doubt our need for compassion and mercy.”

“Mercy?” Alice queried.

“Yes,” Ernie explained, “mercy - pure unearned, undeserved kindness freely given for no other reason than love – to draw us into belief.”

“What was Thomas being asked to believe?” Alice asked.

“It’s a bit like this, Alice,” Ernie explained. “If I say I believe you, it means I see things the way you do. Thomas was invited to see as Jesus sees. The message from Jesus to Thomas, and to us, couldn’t be clearer. Explore those wounds. See suffering as I do. Then believe; see as I see and respond with the same mercy that I’m showing to you right now.”

As you and I receive the Eucharist today, look up there at Jesus on the crucifix. Reach out with your heart and touch His wounds, our own wounds and the suffering of those around us. May we see the reality of our human condition as Jesus sees it, and be drawn by him to show mercy to ourselves and each other, just as he does to us in his own Divine Mercy.