

5th Sunday of Easter “Thomas”

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This Sunday marks the 60th day since Governor Inslee issued his social distancing laws. It was a Wednesday and that following weekend was the first Sunday that we couldn't worship together in our church. As a pastor, I am grateful for so many parishioners continuing to stay connected with our parish even if it is through Instagram, email or our website. I am also grateful for our staff who have kept working through all of this. I think during this time we have discovered that the words “social distancing” is not the right message. Yes, being somewhat physically distant from each other is of course necessary right now. However, physical distance is not social distance. Many of us have found ways to remain socially present the best we can. And this is so very important because being social is an essential part of what it means to be human. It has nevertheless been 60 days and, even harder than that, it is also Mother's Day weekend. As such, this mass is for all you moms out there and for your children who love you.

This is truly an interesting weekend for Jesus to tell his disciples in our Gospel reading, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me”. These words hit me in a far more meaningful way this year if for the only reason many of us are dealing with a lot of anxiety right now about the present and perhaps even more anxiety about the future. Jesus says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God, have faith also in me.” These words from Jesus are like medicine. Jesus tells his disciples this during the Last Supper of all times, just before his passion and death. I can't imagine a scarier time than that. And, all the disciples had to make a decision about their discipleship going forward.

I want to focus on one of these disciples. St. Thomas has been on my mind as of late and here he is in our Gospel reading. You see, I think Thomas can be helpful for us as we navigate these times. A quick refresher about him. In the story of Lazarus, when Jesus says that he is going to go back to an area near Jerusalem, Thomas is the one who courageously says with zeal, “Let us go and die with him”. And then, after Jesus' passion, Thomas is the last of the remaining 11 to believe in Jesus' resurrection. Before he would believe, he said he would need to put his fingers into the nail marks and his hand into Jesus' side. A week later Jesus offered him just that and that's how Thomas became an Apostle. Now, this Gospel reading is just before the passion. And Jesus is telling his disciples to not lose heart, that there many dwelling places in his Father's house and he was going to prepare a place for them. Thomas, of course, is the inquisitive one who asked the obvious question, how do we do that? We do not know the way. And we have Jesus' famous response as a result, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”.

You see, I truly enjoy Thomas because he feels like that one annoying student in every classroom. It seems like every classroom has that one student who raises his hand over and over again with questions and occasional opinions. Do you know what I am talking about? What typically happens is the rest of the students in the classroom begin to hate him for raising his hand so often while the teacher actually finds him or herself sometimes liking that inquisitive

student better than the rest. Why is that? The teacher is secretly thinking, “Finally, a student who isn’t here just for a grade but because they are really interested in this subject”.

Thomas reminds me of students like that and he makes me smile. He is also very human in that he, even during the times of anxiety and doubt, Thomas remains a seeker. And this can give us an interesting reflection for this weekend. As we reflect on the Apostle Thomas, and as we reflect on the fact we marking 60 days of “physical distancing”, we might be encouraged to ask ourselves the question, what does my discipleship look like through all of this? Am I just interested in a passing grade in God’s eyes or am I interested in being more than that? This is why I think Thomas is helpful right now. If we find ourselves operating on autopilot with God, Thomas encourages us to do more. He challenges us to take the time each day to simply raise our hand in Jesus’ presence and continue to ask him for wisdom and for guidance through all of this. This is not the time to be socially distant with God just like this is not a time to be socially distant with each other. Like Thomas, even in times of doubt, we need to challenge ourselves to evolve. We need to evolve. We need to find that way to grow in our faith and to find that way to remain socially present to the people around us. There are many ways that this can be accomplished just like in the Father’s house there are many dwelling places. And, like Thomas, we understand that the only starting place for this personal growth to happen is with a relationship with Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life.