

First-hand knowledge (John 20:24-31)

Thomas was not with the community when Jesus came and therefore was not able to move from fear to joy as they did. Thomas, as the rest of the disciples that first day of the week when Jesus resurrected, was in crisis. Their leader had died and they feared for their own safety. Similarly, the intended audience of the Gospel according to John was in crisis. They were living in the midst of religious turmoil when Judaism was trying to reinvent itself given the destruction of the Temple. They were experiencing conflict and rejection for their belief in Jesus as the Messiah, as the Son of God. Maybe they did not imagine that the cost of believing in Jesus as the Messiah would be to be expelled from the synagogue. Maybe cut out from their original faith community they were reconsidering their belief in Jesus.

Have you ever been in crisis? Do you know first-hand the deep sorrow that losing a loved one causes? Do you know the confusion and disorientation produced by losing your job? Have you experienced the pain of being rejected by your community because of gossip? Has your world crashed down because your marriage broke? Do you know what it feels like to be rejected by your own community and now feel all alone?

The disciples felt the sorrow of losing their leader but they were comforted when Jesus himself stood among them overcoming the barriers they created because of their fears, and showed them his hands and his side. They told Thomas that they had seen the Lord but he did not believe them. He wanted to see and touch Jesus. He demanded proof. He wanted what they had: to see Jesus, but he wanted even more: to touch him. Thomas did not believe them.

Did you believe your brothers and sisters right away when they told you that Jesus was with you in the midst of your sorrow? Were you sure the whole time that Jesus was with you when you were asking God why did he take your loved one away? What about when you lost

your job, or your marriage, or your car, or your house? Was your faith unmoved when you were in crisis? Did not Thomas deserve first-hand knowledge? Do not you deserve it as well?

One week after the resurrection, after Thomas's absence, after the disciples' transformation from fear to joy, the disciples gathered again and this time Thomas was with them. Jesus again appeared among them and apparently knew what Thomas had said. Oh, Thomas, you are in trouble now. Would you dare to speak those words before Jesus? Would you dare to demand to put your fingers and hand into his wounds?

Surprisingly, Jesus offered Thomas practically what he wanted. The verbs in Greek of what Thomas had requested and what Jesus offered were different. The difference between putting inside with force and reaching near or just touch. Yet it is remarkable that Jesus essentially met Thomas in his demands. Jesus gave him first-hand knowledge.

The text does not tell us if Thomas touched Jesus or not. Jesus' gracious offer seemed to have been enough for Thomas. His encounter with the Resurrected One was such that Thomas declared more than any of the disciples who have seen Jesus resurrected throughout John 20. While Mary and the disciples said that they had seen the Lord, Thomas confessed: **My Lord, My God!** His first-hand knowledge led him to proclamation of his faith.

Oh, if only the community of believers would not be content to tell us about their own faith when we are in crisis! If only they would bring us into their midst and surround us with love and bring us to meet the Resurrected One so we can have first-hand knowledge of His presence with us in our crisis! If only they would bring us to the source of the blood that comes out to clean our sins, to the source of the water that springs out to wash away our disbelief, to the source of the Spirit poured out empowering us to continue Jesus' ministry, then we can join Thomas in proclaiming "Jesus is my Lord. Jesus is God."

We are, like the first audience of this Gospel, living in the impossibility to literally see and touch Jesus. But at the end of the story Jesus states that Thomas became a believer because he saw. Then Jesus blessed anyone who has not seen and yet has believed. The Johannine community was blessed because they had not seen and yet believed. We are blessed because we have not seen and yet we have believed.

Moreover, the story is incomplete without verses 30-31. In them our attention is directed to the book in which some signs are recorded so we believe. We may not have Jesus physical presence but we still have the Word and the sacraments and through them we can still find Jesus' presence among us.

This congregation has recently lived through major crises. We lost our last two pastors to allegations of sexual or financial misbehavior. In the midst of our crisis this story calls us to seek God's presence without masks, just as we are, with our faith shaken due to the crisis, with our trust hurt. It is time to honestly tell each other and God what it is we need to not lose our faith. It is time to come to Scripture – the written Word – and the Sacraments – the enacted Word, so we can find anew the presence of the Resurrected One.

Yes, we are blessed because we have believed without seeing. But crises have come to our lives and crises will come again. When they do, do not be shy to ask your community what it is that you need to keep your faith. Do not be shy to ask God to show you proof of His presence. You may, as Thomas did, very well receive it so you may continue to believe.