

Thomas is often referred to as “doubting Thomas” because he doesn’t believe the other disciples when they tell him they have seen the Lord. He says he wants proof. He is sounding like a modern person. We live in an age where people want proofs for everything. Proof usually means that there is some empirical evidence for the claim. This is exactly what Thomas wants. He wants to see the holes the nails made in the hands of Jesus. He wants to be able to put his finger in the holes.

I think if we look across all the gospels, especially when they recount the appearances of the risen Jesus, they are not offering a proof that Jesus is risen. Even in today’s gospel when Jesus appears eight days later to Thomas, we don’t see the proof that Thomas was looking for. Thomas doesn’t need to put his finger into the holes that the nails made in Jesus’ hands. Instead of a proof, what we have is a divine revelation. All a proof would do is show that the Jesus they saw crucified was now alive. But Thomas experiences more than that. Recall what he said: “My Lord and my God”. He saw more than the crucified Jesus now alive. He was seeing his Lord and his God. This is a profession of faith. It is a response to a divine revelation. You don’t recognise a divine revelation by a series of proofs. Rather, you respond to the prompting of God. This is what happened with Thomas. Rather than seeing something that would prove that Jesus was alive, he experienced Jesus greeting him, offering him peace. When Jesus invited Thomas to touch the wounds, Jesus wasn’t seeking to prove something. Rather, he was inviting Thomas to understand the meaning of those wounds. They are wounds that are the fulfilment of his mission. They are wounds that show his love for the world. They are wounds that bring reconciliation to a broken and divided world. They are wounds that show God’s solidarity with the world. The revelation Thomas experienced was drawing him into discipleship.

At the end of today’s gospel, Jesus says that while Thomas saw Jesus with his own eyes, from now on people won’t see Jesus this way. “Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe”. This is addressed to people like us. While we won’t see Jesus with our own eyes as a sort of proof that he has risen, we will truly receive the divine revelation as a gift from God. On that basis we believe.

Jesus taught us even more about this when he breathed on the disciples. As he did so, he said, “Receive the Holy Spirit”. This is his gift to all of us. On Easter Sunday we recalled our baptism as symbolically dying with Christ, being buried with him, and rising to new life with him. We were sprinkled with baptismal water as we renewed our baptismal commitment. The rite of baptism also includes the rite of anointing with Chrism, reminding us that Jesus too was anointed with the Holy Spirit. Today, let’s remember that we have received the Holy Spirit. Through that Spirit, our hearts are always open to the revelation that God makes among us. Through that Spirit, we are able to make our profession of faith in Jesus as our Lord and God.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of peace. “Peace be with you”, Jesus says. These words give us a hint of how we may recognise the divine revelation that comes to us. When we experience a deep peace in our hearts, we may be confident that the Spirit of the risen Jesus, the Holy Spirit, is with us. That peace may even come in the midst of struggles or conflict, when we nevertheless know that God is with us, showing us the path to follow, helping us make decisions.

We will also know that God is revealing himself when we discern the call to live as a disciple of the risen Jesus and to follow him more consciously. That call came to the disciples in today’s gospel as a call to forgive sins. Jesus is telling them that the forgiveness of sins is at the heart of life in Christ. If we think about it, our human experience is so often of being wronged by others or being disappointed by others. Anywhere where there are two or three or more people, there is the potential for conflict and hurt. It can be in families, in neighbourhoods, or even among nations. Humans living together will always need to forgive and be reconciled. But the forgiveness that Jesus is talking about is more than a human action. He is talking about God’s action. In other words, this too is divine revelation.

When Jesus imparts God’s gift of new life at Easter, he sends the disciples to be the sign – not a proof – that he has risen. We too are sent to be the sign that Jesus has truly risen and that he has given new life to the world.