

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, 'I will not believe.'" A week later his disciples were again in the house and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

In the opening verse to one of our favorite Easter hymns, 'Because He Lives' we sing:

God gave his Son, they called Him Jesus;

He came to love, heal, and forgive . . .

To LOVE. **Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."** His words reminded them of the Last Supper command that Jesus gave to his disciples in John 13:34: 'A new command I give you. That you love one another as I have loved you.' It's why we now sing: 'They will know we are Christians by our Love . . . yes, they will know we are Christians by our Love'. Love is a defining Mark of Christian faith. It's the reason that on this baptismal day--- 'Jesus loves the little children, all the children in the world, red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world'---sings through our hearts.

To HEAL. **Then Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."** In his poem, 'These Things Did Thomas Count as Real', Thomas Troeger imagined Thomas' movement from doubt to faith when he wrote: 'These things did Thomas count as real: The warmth of blood, the chill of steel. The grain of wood, the heft of stone. The last frail twitch of flesh and bone. The vision of his skeptic mind was keen enough to make him blind, to any unexpected act too large for his small world of fear. His reasoned certainties denied that one could live when one had died, until his fingers read the Braille, the markings of the spear and nail'. Easter people love to tell resurrection stories of belief that the essence of the Resurrected Christ is the same as the earthly Jesus they knew. Easter people also love to tell resurrection stories in which healing is a real part of eternal life. Like Thomas, in our journey of faith we too want to know that our wounded loved ones are healed in heaven after their earthly sufferings have' ended. So, because God is good ---all the time, the Risen Jesus showed himself to Thomas, thus dispelling his doubt and increasing Thomas' trust

in the goodness of his Maker, and the created order. After inviting Thomas to trace the scars on his hands and side, Jesus assured certainty of soul to future generations of Christians with the words: 'Blessed are those who have not seen yet come to believe. In 'Laughter from Heaven', Barbara Johnson tells a story of this blessing as it came to resurrect a friend's doubting heart. 'One day Lynda was driving on the freeway, singing along with a praise-music CD. It was a beautiful, sunny day, and the bright blue sky was dotted with fluffy snow-white clouds everywhere. Suddenly, as she was singing, she had a mental image of her young grandson, Shaun, who had died a few weeks earlier. "He was riding his skateboard on the clouds, laughing and singing along with me," Lynda said. "He had his arms up, worshiping the Lord, and he was riding that skateboard and smiling at me with the happiest look on his face. The Lord gave me such a gift that day, to let me see that happy image of Shaun." (p. 21-22) The story of Thomas suggests that faith is not a matter of believing the unbelievable, but seeing what is truly real and trusting in the goodness of God'. (from Huey, April 27, 2014)

To FORGIVE. **Jesus said to them again: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.** (John 20:) In Christianity, knowing oneself already forgiven is central to resurrection faith and practice. Last week we celebrated it in the Sacrament of Holy Communion when we shared the cup of blessing for the forgiveness of sins. In the Sacrament of Baptism we witness to it with the words: 'Baptism is the sacrament through which we are united to Jesus Christ and given part in Christ's ministry of reconciliation. . . In Baptism God works in us the power of forgiveness, the renewal of the Spirit, and the knowledge of the call to be God's people always'.

My Good Friday reflection was on Jesus' prayer from the cross, **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** (Luke 23:33) I wrote: 'Christ's was a love which would not be deflected by suffering or injustice. He did not allow pain, humiliation, or malevolence to suffocate his spirit. It was as if his sole desire was to overcome the massive, tangled web of evil

and pain in this world through the virtue of love. How did Jesus keep the darkness of suffering death from emptying his heart of God's Love? In his darkest hour, Jesus prayed, **Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.** It was the prayer that kept the door of his soul wide open for God's filling of it with a Love which casts out all fear. **Father, forgive them for they know not what they do** was the prayer that evaporated the dark powers of fear that lay waiting in the shadows of temptation, eagerly waiting to fill his spirit with the passion to do harm. **Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.** It was the prayer of forgiveness that saved him from every shadowy, lesser passion that did not contribute to God's undoing of the massive, tangled web of evil and violence in the world. **Father forgive them for they know not what they do,** is the first response prayer that we too must pray when we are hurt by others. Years ago a Pennsylvania Amish community lost five young girls to a crazed gunman on a rampage. The community's immediate response to that horrible evil was to extend forgiveness, grace and hospitality to the gunman's family. Some outside the community were offended by their readiness to extend forgiveness, thinking it dishonored the enormity of the atrocity. But the Amish spokesmen's response was that forgiveness was what they preached and practiced in ordinary times . . . and it meant nothing if it couldn't be given in the hardest times'. (Weavings, What You Get for the Price. p. 19) **Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing . . .** is the prayer we must pray daily, if we are to develop an inner spiritual life which is too rich to be destroyed by anything outside of it. It is the prayer that we, like Jesus, must pray from each day's suffering pain of hurt, so that the sun does not go down on the unknown fears that fuel our anger at being violated and harmed. **Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,** is the prayer of forgiveness of God's power that both breaks and prevents the cycle of violence from taking hold of us.

Prayer. Resurrecting God who gives us newness of life, for the Risen Christ's eternal presence of love, healing, and forgiveness in our lives, we give you thanks. Amen.