Second Sunday of Easter

Old St. Patrick’s Church, 2021

Today’s gospel relates a well-known tale

 Featuring the lectionary’s most celebrated apostolic doubter

 Who according to the gospel of John

Engineered a stunning pivot

 From doubter to believer …

A reversal whose suddenness and velocity was so spectacular

It certainly rendered other masters of the pivot

– From snowboarding’s flying tomato

 To diving legend Greg Louganis –

 At least slightly envious.

Without a doubt, this gospel is very much about Thomas’ faith

 But it strikes me as naïve to think

 That his believing began in earnest

 When he finally came face to face with the risen Lord.

 I don’t think Thomas was that – dare I say – “shallow.”

 The gospels actually depict him as quite daring

 And very unvarnished.

 An episode a little earlier in the gospel of John comes to mind.

 During the last supper discourse in chapter 14 of John

 Jesus is waxing on about him going ahead

 To prepare a place.

 He concludes this part of his speech

 By saying to his inner circle

 “and you know the way where I am going.”

 Apparently, all of the disciples were nodding their heads

 Agreeing to something they clearly did not understand

 Like so many undergraduates in their first physics’ lecture.

 But undeterred Thomas unmasks the elephant

In the room.

The poet Malcolm Guite thus deems him the

 Courageous master of the awkward question

 [who] spoke the words the others dared not say

 …cut[ting] through their evasion and abstraction[[1]](#endnote-1)

 By blurting out – but we don’t know where you are going

 So how can we know the way?

Candid Thomas

 Straightforward Thomas

 Guileless Thomas

 Was a blunt pursuer of truth

 A discerning disciple of true faith

 And my instinct is that it was his long pursuit

of a flesh and blood faith

 that brought him to this culminating credal moment

 rather than assuming that this one individual encounter

 birthed his legendary faith.

 And how had Thomas evolved as a faith-seeker?

 And what might his journey have to teach us

 About our own credal pursuits?

 One unlikely clue might reside in the very meaning of his name

 Which at it root means “twin.”

 The New Testament actually doubles down on his twinness

 When it calls him Thomas Didymus

 Which could be translated as Twin the Twin.

 I think there might be something there worth pondering.

Just something like 3% of all live births in the U.S. produce twins

 So, if you are a twin, you are in a very select population.

 If you are an identical twin you are .45% of the population

 A 1 in 250 phenomenon.

 Twins have a national twin day – the 18th of December

 And are hosted at a variety of festivals

 The largest of which occurs, where else, but in “Twinsburg” Ohio

 annually drawing somewhere around 2,000 sets of twins.

 Such gatherings generate innumerable stories

 Of double takes and mistaken identities

 Of amusing gaffs and well-planned deceptions.

 One twin related going down an escalator, looked across

 And saw his twin brother.

 He got very excited and yelled “hey bro”

 Waving for his attention.

 It turns out, he was waving at himself in a mirror.

 Another set of twins would always shop for clothes together

 Twin 1 would find an item she liked

 then twin 2 would go into the changing room

 Come out and model for her

 So she could see how it looked on her.

 Of course, there are endless stories

 Of twins substituting for each other on dates

 Taking each other’s driving exams

 And even applying for jobs for each other.

 I had one such experience teaching at Notre Dame years ago:

twin brothers would often sign each other in for attendance

 Their mistake, however, was signing two names

 When there was no identical face in the room.

 That practice didn’t survive very long.

Apart from the funny or embarrassing stories

 Of mistaken identities or disastrous dates

 There are also twin tales from the dark side.

 One of the most disturbing was a study of twins

 Conducted in the 1960’s and 1970’s

 By two psychologists who worked

 With a now defunct adoption agency.[[2]](#endnote-2)

 Without the consent of participants or their adoptive families

 the agency and researchers

 separated twins and placed them with different families

 never disclosing that the child had a twin

or in one celebrate case, was a triplet.

 The researchers monitored the separated siblings for decades

 Under the pretense of ensuring that each was doing well

 In their respective families.

 The study abruptly ended in 1990, with records sealed until 2065

 and only limited information shared:

 One woman discovered she had a twin when she was 49.

Various news reports and documentaries

 Brought the unethical behavior of the researchers to light

 For example, the productions *Three Identical Strangers*

and *The Twinning Reaction.[[3]](#endnote-3)*

 While these films clearly documented the palpable joy

 of twins and even triplets discovering each other

 they also revealed the profound grief and anger that emerged

 when learning about a severed life.

 One twin noted that her sister “should’ve been the closest

 Person to me in the world, and she wasn’t.”

 Twin expert Professor Nancy Segal concurred

 That the damage done by separating twins & triplets at birth

 Is immeasurable.

I have often wondered what drove Thomas

 Out of that apostolic cave

Where he had been huddling with the other disciples.

 I doubt whether he was just stepping out for some fresh air,

 needed to pick up some groceries for the boys,

 Or had to check in on his pets.

 In my imagination, Thomas abandoned the hideaway

Because his twinning impulse, his twinning instincts kicked in.

So, he was out on the streets

Not looking for his own biological sibling

But searching out Jesus’ twins:

 Those who bore in their flesh or in on their souls

fresh marks of crucifixion.

 Thomas had heard the story from Peter

 About seeing the resurrected Lord

 And probably knew the report of Mary Magdalene

 Who had mistaken Jesus for the gardener

 He was unconvinced, however,

 Maybe because their stories

 Did not report the scars, the wounds

 The marks of violence that remained even after resurrection

 I imagine Thomas long pondered Jesus’ Last supper response

 To his awkward admission about not knowing the way.

 Jesus answered that he was the way and truth and life

 and the events of the Friday we call good

 had clarified for Thomas that this redemptive path

 led directly through Calvary.

 I think Thomas had come to have faith through the wounds

 As incontrovertible signs of a resurrection path.

 Thus, he set out on a journey to touch the wounds,

 To stand in solidarity with victims of racism

 On the streets of New York and Minneapolis,

 To weep with the survivors and grieve the losses

 In Atlanta, and Houston and Orange,

 To lament the starvation of Children in Yemen

 And the military oppression in Myanmar.

 And when he finally returned to that apostolic hideaway

 Thomas could profess faith

 In a Lord whose body was yet scarred and disfigured

 Because he had comforted and consoled Jesus’ twins

 who had suffered their own passion

and whose souls were thus forever welded together

with the Only Begotten in the sting of crucifixion

 And the promise of resurrection.

 My instinct is that is why Thomas didn’t need

to touch anew the wounds of the risen one

 For he had already touched the wounds of Jesus’ twins …

 Thomas recognized the authenticity of the Christ

 For his resurrection did not erase the scars of his suffering

 Nor would it stop the scarring and suffering

 Of all other seeking eternal life.

 Rather Thomas came to understand

that true resurrection

 Always bears the marks of both hurt and hope.

Quite a few years ago,

I had the opportunity to visit South Africa and Zimbabwe

One memory that remains fresh is meeting Fr. Michael Lapsley.

Born in New Zealand, he joined a missionary community

and was transferred to South Africa in 1973.

Lapsley was expelled from South Africa 4 years later.

lived for a while among exiles in Lesotho

then moving to Zimbabwe where he lived with armed guards since he was on a South African Government hit list.

In April of 1990, right after the announcement

that Nelson Mandela was to be released from prison

he received a package from South Africa.

The letter bomb hidden inside religious journals

severed his hands, blinded him in one eye,

and damaged his sight in the other.

All his senses were altered, including his sense of mission.

His maimed body, however, did not prevent his resurrection

Rather, it allowed him to render the bombing a redemptive act.

He said that he always grieves, especially for his hands

But that he is no longer a victim nor even simply a survivor

He calls himself a victor, over evil, hatred and even death.

So claims the founder

of the Institute for the Healing of Memories.

I understand that it’s Easter,

and all of us would like to put Good Friday behind us.

I understand that it’s starting to feel like spring

 And we would like to put

this winter of discontent permanently to rest.

 I understand vaccines are increasingly in the offing

 And we’d like to stop worrying about this pandemic

 And get back to the living we remember.

 But wounds yet abound:

 In the victims of violence

Who will forever carry the scars of their assaults,

In the millions of school age kids

 Disfigured by disrupted learning and peer isolation,

 In the unemployed

 Whose deformed finances and mutilated careers

 May never recover,

 And in the grieving:

 Those innumerable family and friends

 Whose lives will have an unhealable ache

 Whose hears have an unpatchable hole

 Because of a beloved lost to COVID.

The hard truth and great promise of resurrection,

 As our spiritual twin Thomas understood all too well,

 Is that rising from the grave does not erase nail marks

 Vacating a tomb does not vacate the pain of violence and loss

 And conquering death does not remove death

 From our future agenda.

 Rather resurrection offers us the same courage

 The same zeal

 The same faith as our sibling Thomas

 To touch the wounds

acknowledge the scars

 and in doing so recognize the resurrected one in our midst

 wounded yet Risen

 our promise and our hope,

whose mission we pledge to continue

forever and ever.

1. https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2012/07/02/a-sonnet-for-st-thomas-the-apostle/ [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. [Records from controversial twin study sealed at Yale until 2065 (yaledailynews.com)](https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2018/10/01/records-from-controversial-twin-study-sealed-at-yale-until-2065/#:~:text=The%20study%2C%20conducted%20by%20child,adoption%20agency%20Louise%20Wise%20Services) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7664504/> and <https://jfi.org/watch-online/jfi-on-demand/the-twinning-reaction> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)