

April 27, 2025 – 2nd Sunday of Easter

FOUR STORIES IN ONE by Pastor Julio Romero

Gospel: John 20:19-31

I believe that the story of Thomas, along with the account of the two disciples walking toward the town of Emmaus, should be part of the Easter Sunday story we hear every year. I understand this would make the Gospel reading for Easter Sunday quite long—perhaps that's one of the reasons we don't include all of these narratives. But if we studied these three stories together, we would have a fuller and more complete picture of Easter Sunday. We would also see the different ways the first witnesses of the Resurrected Lord experienced the events of Easter in their own unique and personal ways.

The Easter story is one that begins in fear and ends in joy. There is the fear of persecution... the fear that Jesus' body has been stolen... the fear of encountering angels at the tomb... the fear brought on by an earthquake. But then comes the joy: the joy of meeting the Risen Lord in a garden, the joy of encountering Him on a dusty road to Emmaus, the joy of seeing Him again in a locked room, right where the disciples were hiding.

Each of these witnesses experienced Easter differently. Jesus revealed Himself to the two disciples in Emmaus during the blessing and breaking of the bread. Interestingly, even though they had walked and talked with Him for miles, they didn't recognize Him at first. But they did say their hearts were burning within them as this "stranger" opened the Scriptures to them.

Mary Magdalene encountered the Risen Lord in the garden. At first, she thought He was the gardener. But as soon as He called her by name—“*Mary*”—she realized it was Jesus. Her joy came through the sound of His voice.

Then there were the ten disciples, who experienced the joy of Easter through the physical presence of Jesus and the gift of peace—through the gift of the Holy Spirit. But as we heard today, one of them was missing. That was Thomas, also called the Twin.

Thomas was not in the room when Jesus appeared to the other disciples on Easter Sunday. When they told him they had seen the Risen Lord, Thomas responded, “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.”

With that statement, we see that Thomas wanted to experience the Risen Lord in his own way. He wasn't content with just hearing about it. He wanted not only to see Jesus as the others had, but to touch Him—to look closely at the marks of the nails in his hands and put his finger in the wound of the spear, and confirm the resurrection with his own senses. That was how Thomas needed to encounter the Risen Lord.

We all desire to experience the Risen Lord in our lives. What we learn from these four Easter stories—Mary Magdalene at the tomb, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, the disciples gathered in the locked room, and Thomas—is that not all of us experience the risen Christ in the same way, or at the same time.

Yet for these first witnesses, there was one thing in common: they saw Him. They saw Jesus in His resurrected body. And that is what prompted Thomas to say, “Unless I see the mark of the nails... I will not believe.”

“Seeing is believing,” people often say. This phrase is deeply embedded in our culture. For those of us far removed from the time and place of that first Easter, it resonates strongly. And because of that, many of us struggle with the opposite idea: that “believing is seeing.”

Eric Weihenmayer, the first blind climber to reach the summit of Mount Everest, was once asked what he looks for in teammates. His response captures the essence of faith. He said, “I look for people who have an unrealistic optimism about life. I hear people say, ‘Seeing is believing’... I want people who believe the opposite—‘Believing is seeing.’ You’ve got to believe first in what you’re doing and be sure you have a reason to believe it.”

What Eric Weihenmayer gives us is a beautiful definition of faith. Jesus said it this way: *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

We live in an unpredictable world. What we thought was stable and secure yesterday may not be so today—and who knows what tomorrow will bring?

In the midst of this ever-changing reality, and after reflecting on the Easter stories, I ask: **How do we experience the Risen Lord in our lives today?**

I ask this because we have no doubt that the Risen Lord still comes to us. We don't need to see Him to believe that He is risen. We don't need to touch Him to believe that He is alive.

The disciples experienced the Risen Lord in different ways. Mary heard His voice. The disciples on the road to Emmaus felt their hearts burn and recognized Him in the breaking of bread. Thomas saw and touched Him.

Today, the Risen Lord comes to us through His blessings and through the many expressions of love we encounter daily. Each of us experiences the living Christ in our own way.

It is through those daily expressions of love that we experience the presence of the Living God. We don't need to see Him, touch Him, or hear His voice to believe. It is because we believe that we *know* He is risen—and that He is always with us.

Amen.