

Homily 2nd Sunday of Easter 2024

“Surrexit sicut Dixit”

Let's be honest most of us have probably had our doubts of faith and have at times questioned God's unconditional love for us! Whether it be the loss of a loved one, particularly when they are young, or a tragedy in which hundreds of people lose their lives we naturally ask ourselves, 'How can an all loving, all knowing and all-powerful God allow this to happen? Gerry O'Neill RIP, a great and devout Catholic and parishioner of Holy Redeemer, Highcliffe, lost his daughter Jane when she was in her early fifties. Gerry found it very difficult to accept her death and for years could 'not forgive God'. I then saw Gerry a few years ago, at the end of an Alpha Course at St Joseph's, give testimony and publicly proclaim that he had, during the sessions, experienced a great sense of God's love and presence in his life. He knew then, he said, in his 'heart of hearts that Jane was in God's loving presence' and he had now 'forgiven God, knowing that Jane was with him'.

St Thomas, the apostle, also famously doubted Jesus, the Son of God, and refused to believe in His Resurrection from the dead. Thomas had been absent on the day of The Resurrection when Christ appeared to the other apostles and women, the disciples of Jesus. "Unless I put my fingers in the wounds in his hands and place my hand in the wound in his side, I will NOT believe." Thomas had in frustration told the group. Eight days later, the next Sunday, Thomas was present in the upper room, with the other disciples, and Christ once more appeared in their midst. Jesus called Thomas and urged him to put his finger into his pierced wrists and his hand in his wounded side. "My Lord and my God" Thomas cried out in shame. Jesus replied, "Blessed are you Thomas because you have seen but blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Arguably, one of the greatest proofs of Jesus' Resurrection is His presence in The Mystical Body, His Church today. Like The Early Christian Community many past and present Christians live today like the community described in St Luke's Acts of The Apostles. I see this daily in the parishes across the diocese and in my own community of Holy Redeemer where examples of Christ's LOVE abound: Eucharistic Ministers regularly carrying Christ to the housebound, sick and elderly; individuals looking out for those in vulnerable situations and entering into the sometimes 'messiness' of their lives and making a positive difference; welcome ministers greeting parishioners and visitors with genuine hospitality and with warmth; parishioners giving generously to the Pastoral Area Gospel driven initiative (NYPD4CHRIST) to send 12 young people to Lourdes each year to help sick and vulnerable VIPs; parishioners unselfishly offering their time and expertise each week to run parish 'Friendship Groups' such as 'Knit and Natter', 'Technology for The Totally Terrified' and 'Cine Club'; Flower Arrangers who aesthetically decorate the church; gardeners who tend the grounds; cleaners who keep the church 'spic and span'; choir members who practice weekly to enhance our liturgical celebrations; sacristans, readers and all those who enrich the liturgy with their charisms and not forgetting 'taxi -drivers' who enable the less mobile to come to Mass.

Like Thomas, Gerry had a Resurrection experience which removed all doubt from his mind and led him to trust totally in God and His holy plan. Both St Thomas' and Gerry's eyes were opened to the reality of God's real presence in their lives. We too only have to open OUR eyes and see The Risen Christ present in our Christian parish communities and see His LOVE lived out daily in acts of AGAPE (Jesus' selfless love): **The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul; no one claimed for his own use anything that he had, as everything they owned was held in common. The apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power. None of their members was ever in want...**

(Acts 4:32-34)