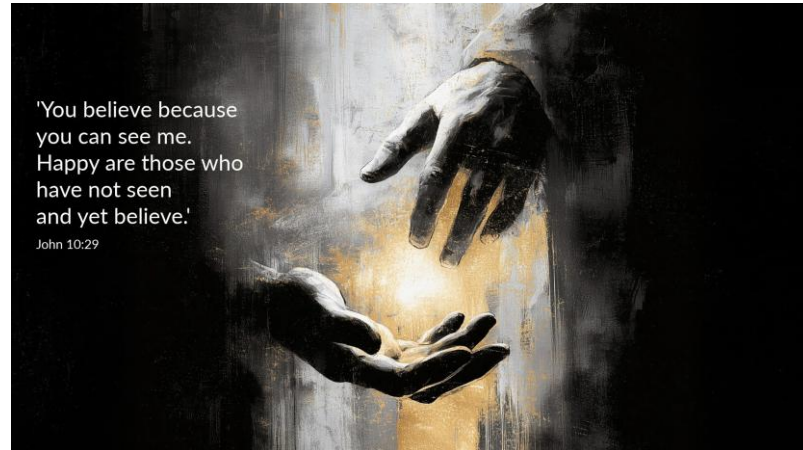


Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Easter [B]

Fr Justin Driscoll April 11th / 12th 2026

5.00pm Ballarat East RCIA), 9.00am Bungaree, 10.30am Ballarat East (Baptisms)



In the days since Easter Sunday, I've been asked many times 'how was your Easter?' I have great delight in saying that 'it's going well, so far!' My response gets a look of inquiry to which I remind the inquirer that in our great Catholic tradition of feasts and seasons with its annual liturgical cycle, that Easter isn't just a day, it's a whole season extending across fifty days! Putting that into perspective is important for our spirituality and prayer to see that the season of Lent extends across forty days – so we are a people who feast more than we fast, and as important as the penitential season is, it's not the main game, it's preparatory to the heart of our faith – Christ's paschal mystery which is celebrated throughout every season, but so explicitly during Easter!

In his great book, *Jesus, A Pilgrimage*¹, James Martin SJ, a U.S. Jesuit who's a great communicator - writes in a ways that's part travelogue, part historical, part spiritual retreat and at times it's also very funny, which is another reason I like it so much! In his chapter titled *Risen*, he suggests that the resurrection appearances show that the Risen Christ understood what each of the disciples needed in order for them to believe. Mary needed to hear her name come from the lips of Jesus, and from today's Gospel, Thomas, who was not present when Jesus appeared to the others gathered in the Upper Room, refuses to believe their reports and demands more tangible proof. For this he is forever saddled with being called Doubting Thomas, which may seem

¹ Jesus. A Pilgrimage, James Martin SJ, New York: Harper One, 2014.

unfair, considering that his fellow disciple Peter denied Jesus at a crucial juncture and despite this he's known as the Prince of the Apostles and has a huge Basilica named after him in Rome! Thomas had good reason to doubt – Jesus risen from the dead? Thomas may have thought his friends laboured under some mass delusion. James Martin wonders if perhaps Jesus chose Thomas to be an apostle specifically for his probing mind or his inability to be deceived, both important attributes for a disciple. Thomas may simply have been more demanding when it came to proof and really he's asking for no more than the others were offered when Jesus appeared to them in the Upper Room.

We could also imagine Thomas, not only crushed by Jesus' crucifixion, but devastated that he wasn't there to see the Risen Christ with the others. Thomas may have felt hurt, even left wondering if Jesus considered him to be unworthy to witness an appearance. It may have been himself that Thomas had begun to doubt.

There is a tradition that St Thomas eventually went as far as India to proclaim the Gospel there. That first missionary impetus has seen the seeds of the Church in India grow, flourish and mature to becoming one of the most prolific communities for missionaries to the rest of the world. We've seen that here in our own community with the arrival of many from Kerala who are part of the Syro-Malabar Rite as well of course as Fr Shaiju who is from the missionary Society of St Thomas the Apostle – so it's their feast day!

If however our tradition seems hard on Thomas, Jesus was not. When he appeared to the group Thomas is with them. But Jesus doesn't castigate Thomas or say "get behind me Satan." He begins by offering "Peace." Far from casting Thomas out of the community, Jesus gives Thomas what he needs: Physical proof. "Put your finger here and see my hands." Then he reminds the others about the value of faith. The Risen Christ is so gentle with doubters, with those who need reconciliation and with those who are confused that they cannot see him. This is especially true today when many handle doubt and confusion with threats and expulsion. See how the Risen Christ responds to doubt – he calls someone's name, he shows, he explains, he welcomes, he forgives, inviting us to know the Risen Christ.

The great spiritual mystic of the last century, Thomas Merton, wrote² that "Faith is not the suppression of doubt. It is the overcoming of doubt, and you overcome doubt by going through it." He goes on to say that "the person of faith who has never experienced doubt is not a person of faith." Furthermore, that it's necessary to struggle in the depths of our being with the presence of doubt. Going through what some religions call the Great Doubt³, to break through doubt into that which is much deeper and richer.

Faith in the risen Jesus doesn't give us absolute certainty. Just because we believe doesn't mean we know all the answers - it doesn't absolve us from searching, faith involves trust, not certainty. Absolute human certainty can lead to intolerance, arrogance and ignorance. There is an increase today in fundamentalism - frightened by the absence of certainties, many have retreated into fundamentalism and what we might call a literal faith. It can be very attractive - for the fundamentalist path seem straightforward, the answers simple, but it's an impoverished way of seeing reality. It results in a rigid, simplistic, moralistic, authoritarian religion. It makes people into a herd, following the exact same path - it might offer a safety to some, but it protects us from the hard work of coming to deep and personal faith. It spares us the anxiety of dealing with choice and responsibility, playing right on our insecurities and fears. But it deprives us of encountering mystery, and the God of mystery, whose presence was experienced amidst fear and doubt, and it deprives us of our God given gifts of reason, intellect, feeling and emotion. What it does ask is that we trust, which is what faith demands, and what the community of faith offers is not the certainty that comes without doubt, but the assurance of God's abiding presence, that the risen Jesus can be encountered anew and will continue to work through us.

² Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Direction Publishing Corporation, 1973), 306.

³ https://beingwithoutself.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/great_doubt.pdf