

Reflection for the Second Sunday of Easter

There are times in life when it can take a little while to 'cotton-on' as the saying goes. This can happen to any of us and it does not mean that we are less intelligent than others, it could just mean that others are not expressing themselves clearly or that what has happened has been very much out of the ordinary. Before I was ordained, I knew of someone who said to a colleague of mine; *I am sorry that I am being little Delphic at the moment.* In very sensitive situations conversations can get obscure and ambiguous. I imagine that it must be very difficult to give free expression to ideas in countries with oppressive regimes who employ ways of listening in to religious and political discussions in order to control what is said and done. But even when straightforward expression is not threatening, there are just some things that are difficult to grasp. Therefore, I have sympathy for Thomas. This was an event, yes, foretold, but completely beyond everyday experience. He found it difficult to believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead without direct experience, which Jesus graciously grants him. But he is stuck with the name 'doubting Thomas' and so are we, for better or worse.

To help us understand an event, we need some background information or knowledge. Other people help us, the education we get from our parents, wider family and friends helps us to understand the world as we grow and our place within it. Then the education we receive more formally at school, institutions of further and higher education and in the world of work help us deepen our understanding and prepare for us for the contribution we are to make as adults. The world would not make sense to us without these most important formative experiences. They are vital. They shape our character too, especially our moral character. In the Christian church we know too that without a formation in faith it is more difficult to grasp the way God's love reveals itself to us through the Church and in daily life. Even though I am sure the other disciples did their best to explain to Thomas what had happened, they could not get the message through. The exchange in the Gospel account is brief, but you can get the flavour: *"When the disciples said, 'we have seen the Lord,' he answered, 'Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe.'* I am sure we have all had difficult exchanges about faith and belief, nevertheless the ground had to be prepared in some way for when the Lord appeared to Thomas.

Many of us will have spent much time preparing the ground for faith, in one way or another, especially for family members. This will have been prayer, conversations, being a Catechist or helping the Parish in other ways and so on. Sometimes with great effect, other times not, but the ground still needs to be prepared or else the person will not be ready. It is the Lord who completes the process. Faith is a gift of God, so it is important to keep praying for that gift for others and deepening our own faith. But it is also what the Church calls an 'authentically human act', that is, faith is not contrary to human freedom nor to human reason. But we also know that the ground has been prepared for a promotion of secular approaches to education and character formation and therefore for atheism or agnosticism. These roots have gone quite deep in our society, so we know that we need prepare the ground more carefully and thoroughly and deepen our prayer. As the Bishop's Pastoral Plan states;

prayer, mission, and formation. To do these things effectively we need a community of faith, of disciples, who say, 'we have seen the Lord'. That community of disciples is the Church, even when it is 'at home' and 'on-line'. We need to be the disciples for those who may call themselves 'Thomas'. Wherever we are currently, and we hope we will be together again before too long, others need us to be people who "have 'seen' the Lord" and can reassure them of his everlasting presence and love, especially at this time.