

April 21, 2020

In the Gospel reading for last Sunday, the literary character, Thomas called Didymus or Thomas called the Twin, appears. I have never been able to find any convincing rendering of the “Didymus” appellation, the “Twin,” as best I can figure it out would be “us” all of us, in the sense that like Thomas we operate on the physical level of understanding everything, at least before we think about it.

When Jesus was finally going to the now dead and entombed Lazarus, it was Thomas who said, Let us go and be killed with him!

Thomas was a guy really into the physicality of life.

Additionally, John the Gospel writer does this double naming in other places, that is give a single literary character a double identity. He did it with Lazarus as Lazarus is identified also as, The one he loves!

That implies in my mind, again us, all of us are implied in whatever happens to Lazarus because all of us are “the one Jesus loves.”

So this Thomas character becomes “doubting Thomas” because he was not present in that room that evening of the first day of the week when Jesus Christ appeared and spoke, so he had the position of unbelief, until he could see the wounds and explore the wounds with his own hand, touch the physical flesh of Jesus, in other words.

But if you read the story as it is written and not what you want it to say, Thomas never does touch Jesus Christ, nor does he put his hand into the side of Jesus.

He believes and when Jesus asks him, “Do you believe because you have seen?” The correct answer if you read the story, can only be, No!

So, why does he believe?

He believes for the same reason all of us believe. On the “first day of the week’ we have gathered just as others have gathered before us with one another and we sing psalms and other songs and we break the Scriptures and the Bread and pour the wine together.

But we are not doing that now and that deeply troubles me. Livestreaming is not the same no matter how well intentioned. You don’t need to see me, half as much as I need to see you.

Like Thomas who was enmeshed in the physicality of life, so are we, and like Thomas it is in the midst of the physicality of life that the spiritual dimension of life is accessed. There are no shortcuts as far as I know for those made in the image and likeness of God.

Just think of the loved ones whom like Thomas need to touch the hands, caress the faces, kiss the flesh of those who have died but, in these times, cannot.

Think of us, denied our presence to and with one another, we stand as Thomas’ aching for the physicality that opens that pathway to the spiritual.

Think of the First Communion that will not happen as planned, the physicality of those rituals of bread and wine and tablecloths and Gabriel’s Oboe, and above all the innocence, the beauty, the promise of those little kids.

I say all of that to remind myself how much this is hurting me, I cannot imagine how badly it hurts so many others but I do not want to lose my sense of hurt because it is only through the wounds of loss precisely through the wounds of loss and only through the aching of our bodies, minds, and hearts that we can “see” through death, that the Divine Life we receive is stronger than death.

Remember that Jesus Christ just like us had to suffer the pain of not “seeing” before he could “see,” that is but one of the mysteries our parents bought for us when we were baptized all those years ago.

Sheltering in place, that is what many of us are doing and, we are thankfully aware that many are not. Many are not sheltering at all but placing themselves in harm’s way and we are aware that many of those people will be harmed.

The reality of the idea called “place” is a stark reminder of our physicality, our flesh and boneness, and our physicality is