



Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Easter

Cardiff Cathedral

Sunday 11th April 2021

Archbishop George Stack

Very few of us, I imagine, have been untouched by the news of the death of the Duke of Edinburgh. We have had wall to wall coverage on radio and TV news. Saturation information in the newspapers. Internet, Youtube, What'sApp and so many other media outlets too. Each have their own particular angle and perspective on the story. A lost prince "of no fixed abode" as he once wrote in a visitors book at a grand house! Dashing young naval hero. Married to the Queen. Dutiful and loyal to the monarch for over seventy years. Devoted father and grandfather. Intelligent. Wicked sense of humour. Dedicated to the well-being of young people. And so much more. All of these stories build up a picture or a mosaic so that we can catch a glimpse of this extraordinary life. I am sure we shall hear a great deal more in the weeks to come. I had better not tell you of my experiences on the three times I met him myself! Another part of the mosaic.

I hope I am not stretching the imagery too far when I say that the wall-to-wall coverage we shall be hearing about the Easter mysteries over these six Sundays is a bit like the multi-faceted reporting of the death of Prince Philip. There is so much to say about the meaning of the Resurrection of Jesus that we have the fifty days of the Easter season to do so. Each of the four gospels give their own version of the death and Resurrection of Jesus – although none of them say how it

happened. They talk about the empty tomb. They talk about the reactions of the woman and the disciples to the fact that “he is not here”. We have to explore the gospel passages during these Sundays of Easter and learn from the meaning of the appearances of Jesus to his disciples. On the road to Emmaus. On the sea shore cooking breakfast for the disciples to show that he really was alive and with them. *“Touch me. A ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have”* (Lk 24:39).

Today’s appearance is probably one of the most famous of all. The doors were closed where the disciples were for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. Not bound by time and space. Closed doors, or hearts, or minds are no obstacle to the Risen Christ. But Thomas was not with them. *“Unless I put my hands into the wounds the nails have made, I refuse to believe”* (Jn 20:25).

“Doubting Thomas” is a man of our time. A sceptic. Demanding proof. Evidence based. Scientific. Unless things are concrete realities, then they do not exist. But there is another side to Thomas as well. Unlike Judas, he did not betray Jesus. Unlike Peter, he did not deny Jesus. He is brave enough to share his doubts with the others because each person’s journey of faith is different to another’s. He refuses to say that he can understand or believe, when he cannot

manage to do either. Some say he should be named Courageous Thomas, or Tenacious Thomas, or Truthful Thomas, having the courage to ask the questions others are afraid to ask – and answer. Jesus comes in different ways to different people.

And that brings me to two of my favourite pictures of the Easter story. One is by Titian and painted in 1514 and can be seen in the National Gallery in London. It shows Mary Magdalene in the Easter Garden, supposing Jesus to be the gardener. When he calls her by name she recognises him and calls him Master and goes forward to embrace him. We hear some of the most famous words in the Bible. “Noli me Tangere”. Do not touch me. I cannot be held, restricted, limited to human understanding and experience. The Risen Christ is present to us in different ways and circumstances.

My other picture is by Carravagio, painted in 1604 called “The Incredulity of St. Thomas”. Unfortunately, you have to go to Potsdam in Germany to see it – or look it up on the website as I did! It portrays the scene in today’s gospel. Jesus saying to Thomas “Touch me”. Put your finger here and see my hands. Place it in my side. Doubt no longer but believe.

“Touch me”. “Do not touch me”. Those two different realities speak to me of the different needs we have in the varying times of our life and in the different circumstances of our journey of faith. There are times when we need comfort, reassurance, warm feelings, when prayers are answered. Devotion, identity, health, well-being, membership of our Church and so many other things that make up the life of faith. We feel close to Jesus, and he close to us, and very beautiful it is too. “Touch me”. Then there are times when we are asked to walk alone, to carry the burden, to have little or no feeling of health or well-being or security or comfort. We walk by faith. The Passion and the Resurrection are two sides of the one reality, the same truth. The suffering of Jesus on the cross and the glory of his resurrection are one and the same reality “Where is God in the midst of human uncertainty and doubt?” Here says Jesus with arms outstretched on the cross.

Let the poet Malcolm Guite have the final word:

St. Thomas the Apostle

“We do not know ...how can we know the way?”

Courageous master of the awkward question.

You spoke the words the others dared not say

And cut through their evasion and abstraction.

Oh doubting Thomas, father of my faith,

You put your finger on the nub of things.

We cannot love some disembodied wraith,

But flesh and blood must be our king of kings.

Your teaching is to touch, embrace, anoint,

Feel after Him and find Him in the flesh.

Because he loved your awkward counter-point

The Word has heard and granted you your wish.

Oh place my hands with yours, help me divine

The wounded God whose wounds are healing mine.