

## Readings for the Second Sunday of Easter

12<sup>th</sup> April 2026

### First Reading: Acts 2:14a,22-32

On the day of Pentecost, Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd,

'You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know – this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. For David says concerning him, "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence."

Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, "He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption." This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.'

### Second Reading: 1 Peter 1:309

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith – being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

### Gospel: St John 20:19-31

When it was evening on the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

### **A Reflection for the Second Sunday of Easter**

Today is sometimes known in the church as 'Low Sunday'. It is the eighth day, or 'octave' of Easter. In Christian tradition, an 'octave' refers to both the eighth day of a major festival and the eight-day period over which that festival is celebrated. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the early church kept octaves of Epiphany, Easter and Pentecost; Christmas was added later, and some saints' days and other festivals gained octaves in the middle ages. The liturgical year became quite busy! After the Reformation, most protestant denominations dropped octaves; the Anglican church retained a few, but now only one remains in part and that is Easter. We still don't keep saints' days during the octave of Easter – any saints day that falls in Easter week is translated to the following week.

Festival octaves started with a 'high' first day, a day of intense celebrations, like Easter was last Sunday. They concluded with a 'low' or less intense celebration on the eighth day. Hence 'Low Sunday'. Ironically, it also a day when attendance at services tends to be lower!

The Easter season lasts rather longer than the octave of Easter: it is 50 days from Easter until Pentecost. During this season, our first reading each Sunday comes from the Acts of the Apostles, describing various events in the witness of the first disciples and the earliest converts to Christianity, before they could even be collectively described as a church. So, for example, today we hear Peter on the day of Pentecost explaining how Jesus' resurrection fulfilled some of the ancient prophecies. Our Gospel readings through these weeks, describe some of the events that took place in the aftermath of Jesus' resurrection, and later some of Jesus's promises to those who follow him.

So, today, we have the story of Thomas, 'doubting Thomas, as he is so often, but so unfairly known. The setting for the first part of today's Gospel is the evening of Easter day. The disciples have just been through the most traumatic three days of their lives, and they are hiding in fear of what might happen next, and then Jesus appears among them. But crucially, Thomas wasn't there at that point, and, when he returned and heard their story that Jesus had appeared to them, he must have thought they were out of their senses. His is a very human reaction and he wants evidence, something we can probably all understand. He says to the others 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe'.

We have a saying for situations that are unusual or unexpected: 'seeing is believing'. It might seem that this is what Thomas is saying here. Well, Yes and No. In John's Gospel, there is a difference between sight and insight – they are not always the same. There is a difference between seeing what is in front of you and understanding the significance of what it means. The other disciples had seen the risen Jesus, but had they recognised the significance? Perhaps, perhaps not. We're not told as the Gospel writer moves on to Thomas, perhaps to emphasise a difference between him and the others.

Thomas had to wait to encounter the risen Jesus. Indeed, he had to wait a week, until the octave of Easter. I can only imagine that it was quite a difficult week for an increasingly frustrated and grumpy Thomas, who must have felt very excluded amongst the surprise and joy of the other disciples. But his patience was rewarded and Jesus appeared again the following week, this time to all of them together. Thomas saw the risen Jesus exactly as the others did and had done so the week before, no more, no less. But his insight seems to have been greater.

We may find the discussion of Jesus' wounds, of Thomas' desire to see and touch them, slightly off-putting, but these are the signs that will prove for him that this really is Jesus who had been crucified. Even for those who were present the previous week, on the evening of Easter Day when Jesus first appeared, we are told that it was when he showed his hands and his side 'then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord'.

Humanly, I think we can understand this. People who have been separated for a long time will say 'Is it really you?' and want to touch the person, as if to make sure. Given the trauma that the disciples have been through, they needed to affirm the scarcely believable. And Jesus understood that need too: he invited Thomas to 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side.' He didn't for a moment rebuke Thomas for wanting more evidence; he wanted him to be absolutely sure. And, apparently without needing to touch, it was enough and Thomas had that 'seeing is believing' moment that was more than just seeing, that was a moment of true insight, as he recognised in Jesus the Christ of God: 'My Lord and my God.'

In this Gospel, Thomas is the first recorded person, other than perhaps Mary Magdalene in the garden, to have that insight into Jesus' full identity, an understanding that the others were just starting to come to, and the wounds are significant in that understanding. But there's another aspect to Jesus' wounds which I would like to touch on, one that's symbolic for us.

As related earlier in John's Gospel, you may remember that the wound in Jesus' side occurred when, as he hung on the Cross, one of the soldiers pierced him with a spear. Water and blood came out, not just blood as we might expect. Without going into detail, physiologically both water and blood confirmed that Jesus was dead. Theologically, it represents Jesus pouring out his life for us. And water and blood are also symbols of baptism and the Eucharist, the sacraments from which the life of the church flows. So, the wound in the side of Christ is not just a wound but also represents new life and transformation, as indeed Thomas was transformed when he encountered that wound.

That this all happened on the first day of the week, the octave of Easter, is not a coincidence. John's Gospel was written for a community that gathered around the Lord's table each week on the first day. It was where they encountered Christ in the mystery of the Eucharist.

So, as we too encounter the risen Lord, on this octave of Easter and every Sunday, in the body and blood of Christ, may we, like Thomas, have our eyes opened, our trust renewed, and may we say with confidence 'My Lord and my God.'