

Gospel text

John 20: 19-31

19 Now on the same day, the first of the week, when evening had come and the doors had been closed, where the disciples had taken refuge for fear of the Jews, Jesus made himself present, standing, in the midst of them and said to them, "Peace be in you!" 20 And while saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. Seeing thus the Lord, the disciples were full of joy. 21 Then he said unto them again: "Peace be in you; in the same way that the Father sent me on a mission, I am also sending you". 22 And while saying this, he breathed on them with these words, "Receive the Spirit 23 If you happen to liberate any from their waywardnesses, they will be removed from their life, but if you happen to leave them with their waywardnesses, these will stay with them."

24 Now Thomas, one of the group of the Twelve, the one people call the Twin, was not with them when Jesus made his presence felt. 25 Then the other disciples said to 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 put my hand on the side of his chest, I will not believe."

26 Behold, eight days later his disciples found themselves in the same place, with Thomas this time. Jesus makes himself present while the doors are closed, standing, in the middle of them and says to them, "Peace be in you!" 27 Then he addressed Thomas, "Put your finger here and look at my hands, put your hand forward too and put it on the side of my chest, and stop being an unbeliever, but become a man of faith." 28 Thomas reacts by saying, "My Lord and my God". 29 Jesus said to him, "You have become a believer because you have seen me. As for those who have become believers without having seen, let them continue, they are on the way to happiness."

30 Jesus produced before his disciples still many other actions revealing the presence of God that were not recorded in this book. 31 But these were so that you would believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by your faith you would have true life through him.

Gospel commentary - Homily

The difficult road to peace

The liturgy of today proclaims this word of John: "This Saturday evening, during the weekly meeting of the community, while the disciples were still cloistered for fear of the Jews, they experienced a presence that brings them deep peace. When that peace gave birth to faith in the one who had been crucified and died, they lived an indisputable joy. But at the same time, they receive the mission to come out of their torpor and bring others to the same faith, to the same peace, to the same joy, and thereby to liberate themselves from the world of waywardnesses and death, in order to know what true life is. This journey of faith is not obvious, as Thomas shows, because it is a question of faith in a crucified one, ie of the discovery of peace and joy through suffering and death."

Friend readers, this narrative poses a considerable challenge to me both in terms of its understanding and its call to faith. First of all, we must break ourselves away from a superficial and first-level reading, as if the evangelist was trying to give me a report on the capacities of the risen Jesus to cross walls, to hear everyone's conversations, including that of Thomas, and to remember that he gave the 11 immediate disciples the power to hear confessions and forgive sins. This story, as expressed in its finale, is for all of us, people of all ages, so that we may have life. Insofar as it is a springboard for an experience of faith, the content of the story cannot simply refer to a past reality, but rather to present elements which are accessible to me and which I have to discover. This is precisely a considerable challenge.

We know that there is a distinction between the physical life and the full life of an authentic person: some are alive, but the heart is dead, while others, despite their precarious health, breathe happiness with full nose. When Jesus speaks of life, I know that it is not just a question of physical life, since he himself died to this physical life.

There is also a distinction between the peace people talk about who want us to "leave them alone", that we do not disturb them, as if peace were the absence of worries, and the deep peace manifested by people in the middle of adversity, worries and the unknown, for example when dying. Jesus said to his disciples, "I leave you my peace" (14, 27), yet he had to face misunderstanding, suffering and death.

There is also a distinction between the joy proclaimed on television by someone holding a bottle of Coca Cola, and the deep joy of someone who has met the love of his life. I imagine that John gives a faithful echo of the life of Jesus when he lends to him this word: "I tell you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy will be complete".

Now the big question: "Where can one experience this peace and this joy, and thereby find the life that worries, suffering and physical death cannot destroy? By delving into my own experience, it comes back to me from a childhood memory: at night, when I was about to fall asleep, my father used to slowly enter the darkness of the bedroom to make sure that the bed was well tucked. I still remember the feeling of peace that I felt: someone was watching over me, I was protected. Obviously, this feeling marked my personality and the paths of my life. However, there comes a day when all this is insufficient to face certain situations. I cannot explain in detail how the transition was made from this feeling born from childhood to my current faith in Someone who watches over me and protects me in all situations, or rather how every day this transition is made. But it

remains that, without this perception of being protected and loved, a human being cannot grow to its full dimension. Without this perception, it is difficult to be liberated from all our enslavements, our revolts, our resentments, in short of our sins.

The evangelist is saying to me: "It was Jesus of Nazareth who made me discover this dimension of the world inhabited by a loving Father". I know that someone like the Dalai Lama, whose peace and joy I admire, finds otherwise this serene force that opens him to the future. What seems fundamental to me, however, is that this perception is made by integrating all our suffering, all our fears, all our wars, all our dead, because our faith is in the resurrection of the dead, not in a life without death. Faith in the future is done without controlling it: the Spirit is like the wind, you hear its voice, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. This is the difficulty Thomas is facing, and which is perhaps ours.

-André Gilbert, Gatineau, January 2001