

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, May 1st 2011

Imagine the scene: the apostles frightened, tired and in hiding, possibly in the upper room where they had celebrated the Passover, their last meal and for most of them their last meeting with Jesus. Maybe Thomas had offered to take a risk and go out to buy bread and then Jesus comes into the room. His greeting, 'Peace be with you' is familiar and deeply significant and consoling as he shows them his wounds, leaving them in no doubt that it really is him.

There are no reproaches, no questions about why they abandoned him, but instead Jesus involves them afresh in his mission: 'As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.' Immediately, he gives them the strength and the courage to do this by breathing on them, saying: 'Receive the Holy Spirit and he gives them power to forgive or retain sins.' The Holy Spirit is gathered up in a ministry of forgiveness and is linked to the absolute need for human forgiveness.

This must have been mind-blowing and they would need much more assurance before they could begin to do what he had asked of them. There was so much more to learn and the fact that Thomas had not been present and found it difficult to accept what the others told him, provided lessons for them and for us. When Jesus returned he was aware that Thomas needed a personal experience, as indeed he knows our need for a personal encounter with him.

Inviting Thomas to put his finger into his wounds not only convinced him but it emphasised to the others that this was Jesus and that those wounds were real.

As Pamela Hayes, rscj, says in "The Heart is a Secred Space": *"They became a sign of assurance that wounds, however they are received, are for our healing and growth and ultimately for our glory. In Jesus they were a cherished memory of love's pain. For all humanity they are an encouragement and a reminder that wounds belong to our wholeness as signs of struggle and courage in commitment"*

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