

I Easter 2025

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

*I St John 5.4-12    St John 20.19-23    St Matthew 28.19-20*

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It's late evening on the Day of the Resurrection. The disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, afraid of the Jewish authorities. They were supporting each other after discovering the body of Jesus was not in the grave where it should have been. They were wondering what was next.

The Gospel tells us Jesus suddenly appeared to them. The door was still locked...Jesus in his Resurrected body did not need it to be unlocked to be let in. Locked doors cannot stop God from accomplishing his purpose. It's tantalizing to think what our own resurrected bodies will be like.

The first thing Jesus said to his disciples was, "Peace be with you." This was more than a greeting intended to calm their fears about his sudden appearance. It was to prepare them for what was next...to implant in their hearts a peace beyond anything the world could give them. He showed them his hands and side and they were happy to see their friend again.

Jesus again said, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." This is the Great Commission...the Disciples are no longer simply Disciples...followers of Jesus...they are *Apostoloi*...the "sent out ones". He breathed on them and said, *"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people's sins they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

Matthew records Jesus saying these words to the Apostles as part of the Great Commission, *"Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age."*

Bishops, Priests and Deacons in a direct line of Succession from the Apostles continue their work...by preaching and teaching and administering the Sacraments. But the work of spreading the Good News about Jesus isn't the sole responsibility of the clergy. Lay people play an important role in the Church's Mission to spread the Gospel because we are all witnesses for Jesus to the World.

The *Prayer Book* unfortunately omits from today's Gospel the appearance of Thomas. His Greek nickname *Didymus* means "the twin". Thomas didn't believe Jesus had risen from the dead...he demanded proof...he wanted to touch the wounds in Jesus' hands and side. We've all heard the expression "Doubting Thomas" used to describe a person who refuses to believe something is real unless he has physical evidence in hand.

Later in the week Jesus made another appearance to the disciples who were behind locked doors. Once again Jesus said to the Disciples, "Peace be with you." Jesus told Thomas to touch the wounds in his hands and side. Thomas had the proof he demanded and said, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus replied, "How happy are those who believe without seeing me!" We believe and we are happy!

John tells us in the Epistle, the World can be an ugly and disordered place that often makes it hard for us to be Christ's messengers of hope. He tells us the only way we can defeat the world is by believing Jesus is the Son of God. Father Massey Shepherd, author of the *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*, writes today's Epistle should remind us at baptism we through faith "*have received of God, in our Christian initiation, victory over the world of sin and evil, and life-giving union with Christ.*"

In the Epistle, John writes there are three witnesses about Jesus Christ: the Holy Spirit, the Water, and the Blood. John goes on to say the three witnesses all give the same declaration about Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit we receive at Baptism, through the cleansing Water of Baptism, and through the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist...we are witnesses to Christ and make the same declaration...he is the Son of God and through him we receive eternal life.

Sometimes we find ourselves wondering what is next for us...we ask God where do we go from here. We live in a world that doesn't seem much interested in hearing the Good News about Jesus Christ. We shouldn't let that discourage us from being his ambassadors. We have Jesus' own words to keep us focused on him, "*The world will make you suffer. But be brave! I have defeated the world!*"

