

A young boy was sitting in church with his mam and he asks her,  
“Is Mass almost over?”

“Not yet,” his mom replied, “Why?”

“I think I’m gonna be sick.” The boy answered.

His mom answered back to him, “If you’re gonna be sick,  
go out the back of Church go around to the side and go behind a bush.”

The little boy left the pew, and went running to the back of Church.

He wasn’t gone but 30 seconds or so and he came back.

His mom asked him, “Did you get sick?”

He nodded his head yes and his mom said, “You didn’t have time  
to get all the way out of Church.”

“I didn’t have to” said the boy.

“I saw a box in the back of Church that said For the Sick.”

The Gospel reading we just heard is the same gospel reading every year  
for the second Sunday of Easter.

Most of the time in our Church the readings follow a three year cycle,  
But on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter every year we hear this reading.

It’s commonly referred to as the story of Doubting Thomas.

So if we hear this every year, that means I have had an opportunity to  
preach on this reading probably 25 or more times as a priest.

I keep most of my homilies and I went back and looked at them.

In all but one, when I preached on this Gospel, I preached about Thomas  
and his reaction, his doubt, his misgivings at the news  
that Jesus had risen from the dead.

But this year when I read the reading this time, it suddenly occurred to me  
that this takes place the evening of that first day of the week—  
the evening of the first Easter.

And what struck me wasn’t what Thomas did that evening...

what struck me...and maybe what should have struck me sooner than this  
was what JESUS did that first Easter evening.

Because in this reading, Jesus does three very important things:

One he says: Peace be with you.

Then, two, he says: As the Father has sent me so I now send you.

And then 3, he breathes on them and says,

“Receive the Holy Spirit, whose sins you forgive are forgiven them,  
Who sins you retain are retained.”

I want to take a closer look at those three things.

First he says, Peace be with you.

It's pretty easy for us 2000 years later to drive by that statement.

We think Jesus is a nice guy and he offers them peace.

What a nice thing to do. This is just Jesus being nice.

But it is so much more than that.

Jesus is saying, “Look guys I remember what happened 4 days ago  
on Thursday night when all of you abandoned me...Peace be with you.

And I remember Peter that you denied even knowing me three times,  
Peace be with you...

And I remember on Friday that no one except John was with me  
while I hung on the cross...Peace be with you...”

this is not Jesus simply being nice, this is Jesus saying, “You all left me,  
abandoned me, denied me, deserted me, but I still love you.

Peace be with you.”

And then he continued, “and not only do I still love you but I still call you...  
As the father has sent me so I now send you...”

Jesus gave them again a mission. Why did he need to do this?

Because they had given up...

This occurs on the evening of the first day of the week, but that afternoon  
Jesus runs across two of his disciples leavening Jerusalem  
and going back home to Emmaus.

Jesus is dead...our hope is gone....

our mission is done before it even really begins.

Time to get on with our lives.

But Jesus is telling the 11 today...Your job is not over...

Good Friday was not the end....it was only the beginning...

now here is your mission.

As the Father has sent me so I now send you...

And then he did this: He breathed on them

2000 years later, we don't catch the significance of this...

but every good Jew would have.

When was the last time God breathed on someone?

At the very dawn of creation when God breathed on Adam  
and Adam became a living being.

We miss that now, but they would not have missed it...

They would have realized, this is something new!

And then he says to them, "Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them,  
whose sins you retain are retained."

It is almost as if he is saying, "Just as I have just offered you peace  
and forgiveness and reconciliation, you have to go and do the same.

Remember Pilate who condemned me to death...go forgive him.

Remember the soldiers who nailed me to that tree...go forgive them.

Remember the crowds who shouted crucify him...go forgive them too.

And while you're at it forgive yourselves...because you've got a job to do.

It's not often in our world that we have a model of that kind  
of radical forgiveness, but we did on October 2, 2006.

You might remember the event.

As has happened all too frequently in our country,  
a gunman walked into a 1 room Amish school house,  
shot and killed five little girls before turning the gun on himself.

It has become all too common.

But what wasn't common was the response of that Amish community.

As they gathered together to console one another that evening,  
the grandfather of one of the victims was heard to say to a younger  
member of the community,

"We must not think evil of the man who committed these acts.

He has a father and a mother, a wife and he has a soul."

The father of one of the victims made this statement to the press:

"I don't think there is anybody here that wants to do anything but forgive..."

And not only reach out to those who have suffered a loss in this way,  
But also reach out to the family of the man who committed these act.”

And they did...

The very next day a group of Amish went to the home of the parents of the man and offered them condolences on the death of their son.

It was reported in the papers that the father of the gunman fell into the arms of an Amish man who held him for nearly an hour as he sobbed.

The Amish were criticized by some in the press who said you can't offer forgiveness when there is no remorse.

Their response was: We are doing what Jesus did on the cross when they showed no remorse and he said,  
“Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

I've always called this gospel story the story of Doubting Thomas,  
But it is not the story of Doubting Thomas...  
it is the story of Resurrected Christ...who gives to his apostles  
Peace...Mission...and Mercy...

And who says to them and who says to us...  
“Now you go and do the same.”