

## Sunday Connection



## Second Sunday of Easter, Cycle A (or Sunday of Divine Mercy)

Sunday, April 19, 2020

### Readings & Background

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#### This Sunday's Readings

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##### First Reading

*Acts of the Apostles 2:42-47*

The first community of Christians grows as its members meet to pray and break bread.

##### Responsorial Psalm

*Psalm 118:2-4,13-15,22-24*

God's love is everlasting.

##### Second Reading

*1 Peter 1:3-9*

We have new hope because of Jesus' Resurrection.

##### Gospel Reading

*John 20:19-31*

Thomas believes because he sees Jesus.

##### Background on the Gospel Reading

The Gospels tell us that Jesus appeared to the disciples on several occasions after they discovered that his tomb was empty. Part of the mystery of Jesus' Resurrection is that he appeared to his disciples not as a spirit but in bodily form. The bodily form was not one that the disciples recognized though. In John's Gospel, Mary of Magdala does not recognize that the figure standing before her is Jesus until he speaks to her. In Luke's Gospel the disciples who meet Jesus on the road to Emmaus do not recognize him until he breaks bread with them. The resurrected Jesus had a physical presence, but the disciples couldn't recognize Jesus unless he allowed them to. His resurrected body, nonetheless, showed the marks of his crucifixion.

From readings such as today's Gospel, we also see that in his resurrected body, Jesus seems to be free of physical constraints. He appears to the disciples despite the fact that the doors were locked.

Jesus greets his disciples with the gift of peace and the gift of the Holy Spirit. In doing so, Jesus commissions his disciples to continue the work that he has begun: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." During the meeting, Jesus also shows the integral connection between forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The story of Thomas illustrates our Christian experience today: We are called to believe without seeing. In fact, all Christians after the first witnesses have been called to believe without seeing. Thomas's doubt is hardly surprising; the news of Jesus' appearance was incredible to the disciples who had seen him crucified and buried. Thomas's human nature compelled him to want hard evidence that the Jesus who appeared to the disciples after his death was indeed the same Jesus who had been crucified. Thomas is given the opportunity to act on that desire. He is our witness that Jesus is really risen.

Our faith is based on the witness of the Church that has preceded us, beginning with Thomas and the first disciples. Through Baptism we receive the same Holy Spirit that Jesus brought to the first disciples. We are among those who are "blessed" because we believe without having seen.

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## The Second Sunday of Easter is celebrated as Divine Mercy Sunday.

### Grades 1-3

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#### Gospel Reading

John 20:19-31

Thomas believes because he sees Jesus.

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### Making the Connection (Grades 1, 2, and 3)

Young children can be literal, concrete thinkers. Yet their capacity to imagine is also quite strong. By attending to both traits, we can invite children to contemplate the experience of the first disciples to whom Jesus appeared. We can also lead them to both truths: "Seeing is believing" and "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

#### Materials Needed

- A clear glass filled with water
- A pencil

#### Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Before class, place a pencil in a clear glass of water so that part of the pencil stands above the water. The pencil should appear to be crooked, and the underwater part of the pencil should appear to be larger than the rest of the pencil. Show the submerged pencil to the children and ask: *How many of you think that part of this pencil is bigger than the rest of it? Are you sure?* Allow children to respond and then ask: *How many of you are certain that the pencil will be straight when I take it out of the water?* Take the pencil out of the glass and ask: *How does the pencil look now? Is it straight? Is one part of it larger than the other?* Say: *We rely on our eyes to see the truth, but sometimes things are not what they seem.*
2. Say: *There was a time after Jesus' death when he appeared to his friends. They could hardly believe their eyes. They knew he had died, but then he was standing in a room with them. How do you think Jesus' friends felt to see him alive?* (happy, surprised)

3. Say: *One of the disciples, Thomas, was not with the others when Jesus visited. Thomas refused to believe them when they told him that Jesus was no longer dead. Thomas said that he would only believe when he had seen Jesus. So Jesus visited the disciples again when Thomas was there so that Thomas could see for himself.*
4. Say: *Let's listen to that story from the Gospel.* Read the Gospel, John 20:19-31, to the children.
5. Say: *The Gospel story this week ends with Jesus telling us not to rely on our eyes alone to believe. We need to believe even though we can't see Jesus face-to-face. What are some things that can help us see Jesus without relying on our eyes? (Bible stories, priests, teachers, examples of love and kindness even at difficult times)*
6. Pray together that we will see with eyes of faith. Pray together an act of faith, using Thomas's words, or pray a prayer to the Holy Spirit.

## Grades 4-6

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Gospel Reading

John 20:19-31

Thomas believes because he sees Jesus.

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### Making the Connection (Grades 4, 5, and 6)

Many young people easily identify with Thomas's request for proof of Jesus' Resurrection. As we all must learn, however, first-hand evidence of many things is not always possible; we come to accept many things based on the words and experiences of others. It's normal for young people to question what they can't experience for themselves. We endeavor to accept their skepticism as Jesus accepted Thomas's doubt. Ultimately, young people can come to believe in the Resurrection just as Thomas did when he encountered the risen Lord.

Materials Needed

- None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Tell the children that this week's Gospel is the second Sunday of the Easter season. Remind them that in last week's Gospel the disciples discovered that Jesus' tomb was empty, but the disciples did not understand what that meant.
2. Say: *In today's Gospel we hear that the disciples met Jesus after he was raised from the dead. Let's listen to the description of this event in John's Gospel.*
3. Invite a volunteer to read the first part of today's Gospel, John 20:19-23.
4. Ask: *With what words did Jesus greet the disciples? ("Peace be with you.") How did the disciples know that it was Jesus who appeared before them? (He showed them his hands and side.) What gift did Jesus give to them? (the gift of the Holy Spirit) What did Jesus expect the disciples to do? (Jesus expected the disciples to continue the work that he had begun. Jesus told them that they had the ability to forgive sins.) How do you think the disciples felt after that encounter with the risen Jesus? (Accept all reasonable answers.)*
5. Say: *There is more to today's Gospel. One disciple was not with the others when Jesus appeared. Let's hear what happened when he heard about Jesus' appearance.*

6. Invite a volunteer to read the second part of today's Gospel, John 20:24-31.
7. Ask: *What did the disciples tell Thomas? (that they had seen the Lord) How did Thomas respond? (He didn't believe it. He wanted proof.) What proof did Thomas want? (to see Jesus' hands and side) Do you think Thomas's reaction to the news about Jesus was reasonable? Why? (Accept all reasonable answers.)*
8. Say: *When Jesus appeared to Thomas, Thomas believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead. What did Thomas say to Jesus? (Thomas called Jesus his Lord and God.) Say: Because Thomas saw Jesus, Thomas came to believe that Jesus was his Lord and God. What was Jesus' response to Thomas? (Jesus said that people who believe in his Resurrection without actually seeing him are blessed.)*
9. Say: *Jesus was speaking to Thomas, but he was also speaking to us. We too are asked to show that we believe in Jesus as our Lord and God. We believe because of the witness of those who have gone before us in the faith.*
10. Conclude by praying together that we will remain confident in the faith that we have received from the apostles and the Church. Pray the Act of Faith together.

## Grades 7-8

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Gospel Reading

John 20:19-31

Thomas believes because he sees Jesus.

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### Making the Connection (Grades 7 and 8)

The story of Thomas illustrates our Christian experience today: We are called to believe without seeing. Thomas is our witness that Jesus is really risen. Young people at this age can relate to Thomas, who wanted hard evidence that the Jesus who appeared to the disciples after his death was indeed the same Jesus who had been crucified.

Materials Needed

- None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Ask the young people to describe the role of a witness at a trial. (to provide credible evidence to persuade a jury)
2. Explain that we are called to be witnesses on behalf of Jesus.
3. Say: *In this Sunday's Gospel, we learn about the Apostle Thomas, who was called to be a witness to the risen Jesus.*
4. Invite a volunteer to read the Gospel for this Sunday, John 20:19-31.
5. Say: *One disciple was not with the others when Jesus appeared. Who was that? (Thomas)*
6. Ask: *What did the disciples tell Thomas? (that they had seen the Lord) How did Thomas respond? (He didn't believe it. He wanted proof.) What proof did Thomas want? (to see Jesus' hands and side) Do you think Thomas's reaction to the news about Jesus was reasonable? Why? (Accept all reasonable answers.)*
7. Say: *When Jesus appeared to Thomas, Thomas believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead. What did Thomas say to Jesus? (Thomas called Jesus his Lord and God.) Say: Because Thomas saw Jesus, Thomas came to believe that Jesus was his Lord and God. What was Jesus' response to Thomas? (Jesus*

said that people who believe in his Resurrection without actually seeing him are blessed.)

8. Say: *Jesus was speaking to Thomas, but he was also speaking to us. We too are asked to show that we believe in Jesus as our Lord and God. We believe because of the witnessing of those who have gone before us in the faith.*

9. Conclude by praying together that we will remain confident in the faith that we have received from the apostles and the Church. Pray the Act of Faith together.

## Family

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Gospel Reading

John 20:19-31

Thomas believes because he sees Jesus.

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### Family Connection

Many of us can relate to Thomas's response to the news that the disciples had seen Jesus. We want to see for ourselves too, but we grow in faith, trusting the experience and knowledge of others.

Many of us have heard the saying "Seeing is believing." As your family gathers, take some time to consider what that saying means. What are some things we believe because we see them? Is there anything we believe without seeing? Today's Gospel reminds us that faith sometimes asks us to believe things we cannot see with our eyes. Read today's Gospel, John 19:19-31, with your family. Think about Thomas's response to the reports about the risen Lord. Is Thomas's doubt reasonable? How does Jesus respond to Thomas? Jesus grants Thomas the evidence that Thomas needs to believe, but Jesus also affirms the faith of those who will be called upon to believe without first-hand experience. We are among those whom Jesus calls blessed. Discuss with your family the basis of each member's faith in Jesus—the witness of the first disciples, the Gospels, the continuing activity of the Holy Spirit, the community of the Church.

Pray together that your faith in Jesus will be strong. Pray an act of faith together.