

Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

When one first hears these words, we are tempted to think that Our Lord is rebuking Thomas. Perhaps Thomas is being rebuked, but he wasn't asking that much more than what the others had already received.

We read: **Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you. "When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.**

Perhaps Jesus did not rebuke Thomas so much as He used this opportunity to teach something important to those He chose to lead His early Church. It was a lesson that was as profound then as it is even today, especially in the wake of the passing of the Successor of Peter. That lesson is this: After Jesus ascended into Heaven, it was His Apostles, and their successors that had the task of preaching, teaching and keeping alive the Good News of Christ Resurrected.

And so, in his Divine providence, Jesus revealed Himself to Thomas. Jesus knew that without physical evidence in the beginning, we would not be able to accept the words of St. Peter in today's second reading:

**Although you have not seen him you love him;
even though you do not see him now yet believe in him,**

Jesus understands that we humans are sensual people, that is we make the use of our senses, like Thomas to enhance, and even verify our experiences. Through His Apostles and all of those Holy Successors of the Apostles, Jesus has left us with a legacy of His truly tangible, touchable Mercy in the Sacraments.

Thomas asked for proof by touching the Risen Christ. We have that privilege each and every Sunday, in fact everyday when we receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. We hear the breaking of His body at the fractioning rite, we smell the heady aroma of His mercy in the cup of His blood poured out for us. We truly taste and see the Goodness of our Lord.

The words of absolution in the sacrament of Reconciliation, ring in both our ears and in our hearts, the truth of a Merciful God.

The smell and the feel of the Holy Chrism oil as used in the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders, is a fragrant reminder of the kindness and mercy of our Savior.

This past Easter Vigil, I had the humbling honor to be present when the Archbishop confirmed the newly baptized and those coming into full communion with us. I walked behind him, and so the smell of the Chrism filled my nostrils, as I looked into the face of holiness on those men and women who were newly confirmed. I imagine Heaven will smell like that oil.

And let us not forget our practices, our sacramentals that, in and of themselves are not Sacraments, but remind us and call us to the Sacramental life. Things like the coolness of the Holy Water on our fingertips and our foreheads, as we enter this magnificent Cathedral, recalling our Baptism.

We take in the fragrance of the incense reminding us of the sacredness of how and why and where we worship, of the value of our prayers as they rise with the smoke to Heaven.

We know the feel of rosary beads, both new, and those worn smooth from prayers for your families, yourselves, friends, and most recently for our Holy Father.

The holy cards, gathered from the funerals of loved ones, held in the pages of your prayer book, the Holy images and the names on those cards reminding us to ask in faith for Christ's mercy to shine on their souls.

Over the last few days, with our senses of sight and hearing, we have witnessed, hours and hours of television coverage of our Late Holy Father's life. We were witness to the vast outpouring of prayers from every corner of the world, a huge number of them who are not Christian. Why do you think that was? Why the vast coverage? Because it was more than a news story. It was the story of a person, the Vicar of Christ who was able to touch everyone he came in contact with, in whatever form with the mercy and love of Christ. He

was able to do that because he himself understood the mercy of Jesus. He understood the love of our Lord. He was a sensual man, who would spend hours adoring Jesus in the Eucharist. He was a Sacramental man who understood the kind mercy of our Lord in the all of the Sacraments of the Church. He was a champion of life, because he knew first hand how little some people cared about human lives. He knew the suffering of peoples, and he united himself in solidarity with their sufferings. He brought dignity to those most thought of in this culture of death to be undignifiable. In short, he was a living Icon of Christ.

You might be thinking, well that was the Pope, and He had the advantage to teach and act publicly as Jesus. People respected him and loved him. And you know what, you are right. He was Holy and respected and loved, but it was not just because he was Pope. It was because he was in love with the Lord as revealed to him in the Scriptures, the Sacraments and through the teachings of the Church. And his life reflected that love.

And that is NOT some unfair advantage reserved for Popes and Bishops!

We have been given by Mother Church the Gift of the Holy Scriptures. We too are a sensual people. We too are a Sacramental people. We receive, from the consecrated hands of our Holy Priests and Bishops the same Body and Blood of Christ that the Popes throughout the ages have received. If we are what we eat, then that alone should be transforming **US** into icons of Christ.

We are heirs with Christ to the Kingdom of Heaven. And as such, we should be proclaiming the wounds of the Glorified, Risen and Merciful Christ to every doubting Thomas we meet.

I believe we have been very fortunate to have lived during the reign of John Paul II, because perhaps more than any other, he has prepared the WORLD, to accept the fullness of the Truth, to accept the bountiful Mercy of Christ, for us to proclaim as Jesus did this morning to Thomas: **be not unbelieving, but believe.**