

Read

Acts 2:42-47

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

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31



REFLECTION

In the movie *Henry Poole Is Here*, the skeptical and depressed protagonist finds himself surrounded by an oddball group of people who believe God is at work through a Jesus-shaped stain on his house. Like the apostle Thomas, Henry Poole isn't quite ready to trust this community—or God. He is too busy hiding from his own secret pain to have faith in anything.

Thomas missed seeing Jesus because he wasn't with the other apostles. Maybe, like Henry Poole, Thomas' reaction to grief and fear was to isolate himself. Whatever his reasons, Thomas is skeptical of the testimony of his fellow disciples. Although he has no reason to believe his friends are lying about seeing the risen Jesus, Thomas declares that he will not believe until he sees what they have seen.

Why doesn't Christ appear to each of us as he did to the disciples (and Thomas)? Perhaps the lesson here is that faith is not meant to be individualistic. Our faith rests on the unbroken chain of testimony stretching from the disciples to today, as well as on the witness of our community of faith.

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ John tells us why he wrote his Gospel account. How can the reason for John's writing inspire the purpose of your life?
- ❖ Jesus is physical enough that Thomas can feel his wounds, but is able to pass through locked doors to reach his disciples. Do I believe that Jesus can reach me behind the locked doors of my heart?

LIVING THE WORD

Second Sunday of Easter / Sunday of Divine Mercy

April 16, 2023

ACTION

In the movie, Henry Poole is faced with a choice. He's been hiding from hope and connection. Will he ask Jesus to heal him, or is that hope too frightening to express? It can be easier to be cynical than it is to embrace hope and risk disappointment. This week, take a leap of faith. Bring Jesus the hurts you had given up on having healed. Dare to hope. Give Jesus a chance to surprise you.



Henry Poole Is Here

[https://www.imdb.com
/title/tt1029120/](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1029120/)



April 16, 2023

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER / SUNDAY OF DIVINE MERCY

LECTIONARY #43A

Acts 2:42-47

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

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

After the resurrection, Jesus returns to visit the disciples in today's Gospel passage. The disciples are afraid that they will be persecuted because they are followers and friends of Jesus. When Jesus enters the room, he offers them peace. He calms them and shares the gift of the Holy Spirit with them. However, Thomas is missing from the scene. He needs the same chance to encounter the risen Christ that the other disciples had. The story of Thomas reassures us that in our faith life, when we have doubts, they can be an invitation to seek a deeper faith and to open ourselves to encountering Christ.

Q FOCUS: *Faith involves more than sight; we must use our hearts and minds as well.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

This Sunday is commonly known as Divine Mercy Sunday. The devotion of Divine Mercy began with a young nun in Poland, Sister Maria Faustina Kowalska. She was a sister with the Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. She had many revelations from Jesus, and she compiled these experiences in a notebook that is published now as her *Diary*. In these visions, Jesus asked that she pray for mercy for others and to share that message of love and care with the world. The Chaplet of Divine Mercy is a prayer that was gifted to her in these experiences so

that it could be shared with all. She was canonized a saint by Pope John Paul II in 2000.

Church Teaching Connection

"The Apostle Thomas' case is important to us for at least three reasons: first, because it comforts us in our insecurity; second, because it shows us that every doubt can lead to an outcome brighter than any uncertainty; and, lastly, because the words Jesus addressed to him remind us of the true meaning of mature faith and encourage us to persevere, despite the difficulty, along our journey of adhesion to him" (Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, September 27, 2006).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 20:19-31

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, 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. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said

this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

Today, we hear the story of Thomas. Jesus appears to the disciples while they are locked away from the rest of the world. The disciples are followers of Jesus, and they fear for their lives. They think that they will be persecuted, just as Jesus was. When Jesus appears to them, he first offers them peace. These words of Jesus are the words that we speak to one another during the Liturgy of the Eucharist at Mass. Jesus speaks these words to calm the disciples who are

worried and probably wondering why and how Jesus is back with them. They see the wounds in his side and hands and begin to understand that he is the messiah, who has come back to teach them a little bit more before he ascends to heaven.

Jesus breathes on the disciples, and in so doing, he bestows upon them the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is breathing and moving among us right now, in our time. It enables us to be courageous and brave, kind and compassionate, and to follow closely in Jesus' footsteps.

► **How does the presence of the Holy Spirit help you have faith? Have you ever noticed the Spirit at work in your life?**

Once the disciples have this experience, they are changed. Yet, one disciple is missing from this encounter, Thomas. Though the disciples inform him of Jesus' visit, he does not believe. After the violent events of the crucifixion, it is understandable that Thomas is unsure of their claim. He needs to encounter Christ as they have, in order to believe, which has earned him the unfortunate nickname "Doubting Thomas."

► **Have you been in a situation where it has been difficult to believe something without concrete evidence? How did you resolve the situation?**

Doubting in our faith life is not always a bad thing. It can help us to come to a deeper understanding of the truth of our belief. When we feel doubt, we must persist in finding the truth, in turning to Jesus, and encounter God in our lives. For Thomas, his deeper understanding of faith was to proclaim Christ as Lord and God. What a wonderful revelation!

Our faith demands that we believe without seeing, often without concrete evidence. This is the true measure of faith because we might not have the chance like Thomas and the other disciples to encounter Jesus physically. Our faith is built on belief and is supported by the community of faith that surrounds us.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the “Church Teaching Connection” on page 164.

Doubting is not always a bad thing if it inspires us to seek the truth.

By sharing our faith experiences with other, we help build up the faith of the Church.

We are encouraged to seek out authentic encounters with Jesus.

Act on the Word

Doubting Disciples

For this activity, you will need index cards and pens or pencils. Also, it would be good to invite your pastor or another parish priest to join you. You will also want to have a copy of the *Catechism* and access to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' website (<https://www.usccb.org/>) for reference.

For this activity, you will lead a discussion of questions and doubts that the young people raise about the Catholic faith. Consider inviting the pastor or another parish priest to join you as well. You, or another catechist, and the pastor can be on a “panel” to answer the questions.

Instruct the teens that the group is going to have an open and honest discussion of their anonymous questions and doubts regarding the Catholic faith and its teachings. Direct the students to take a few index cards and write questions that they would like answered by you or the priest. They can be as honest as they feel comfortable to be.

When the teens have completed their questions, collect the cards and read through them, verifying that they are real questions and can be answered by you or the priest.

You will begin reading one question at a time. The teen who wrote it can identify himself or herself, but that is not required. You or the priest should answer the question as honestly as possible. Refer to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' website and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as needed for reference to give complete and correct responses. If there are questions that you or the other panelists are unable to answer, say that you will do more research to find the answer and share with the teens next week. It is okay not to have all the answers, and it is important for the teens to see this. It is also important to teach them where to turn to find answers.

At the end of the activity, explain that Thomas needed the physical presence of Christ in his midst and touching Christ's wounds in order to believe. Though we might not have that physical experience of Jesus, we have adults and mentors in the faith who can help us when we doubt and when we falter. We have the Church's long Tradition of teachings and Scripture to help us with our unbelief as well.

Closing Prayer

*O God of enduring mercy,
as we rejoice in the everlasting peace
of your Son, Jesus Christ,
grant that we may be worthy witnesses
to his presence in the world
and bearers of that same peace in all that
we say and do.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son,
who lives and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.*

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.