Dear Parishioners,

As we celebrate the glow of the Easter mystery, there will always be people who will challenge our faith in the resurrection. They might say: “What empirical evidence do we have that Jesus actually rose from the dead?” After all, no one was present when Jesus’ lifeless body began to once more experience the breath of life. All we have is an empty tomb, the burial bands and the witnesses of a few of His disciples. It was on that first Easter morn that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, then to the Apostles and St. Paul says that Jesus appeared to 500 of his disciples. How do we explain something that is medically and even scientifically impossible? How does this impact our faith?

*Witnessing versus Seeing*

When we speak of the resurrection of Jesus, we give witness to His rising. In fact, very few people saw the Risen Christ. There were the women who went to the tomb and they encountered the Risen Lord. Jesus also appeared to His Apostles several times prior to His ascension into heaven. Paul tells us in his letter to the Corinthians that Jesus appeared to 500 disciples before appearing to Paul himself. However, since that time, millions of Christians have witnessed the presence of the Risen Christ either from within or outside of them. It is because of that witness Jesus can say to us: “Blessed are you who have not seen, but have believed.” Can we prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus rose from the dead, we can’t- however we believe that He did so and we share that message to our families, friends and community.

*Seeing the Risen Christ*

Doubt is certainly front and center on this second week of Easter. Clearly, Thomas had a scientific mind- he needed evidence- he needed proof of the resurrection. But there was another side of Thomas. On the fifth Sunday of Lent, we saw a very brave Thomas. When Jesus gets word of Lazarus’ illness, Jesus is determined to go to him and we find Thomas saying: “Let us go, too, and die with him.” These aren’t the words of a timid and fearful man.

But today, Thomas needed proof, he couldn’t trust the words of his fellow apostles. He needed to put his hand into His wounds, before he could believe. And that’s exactly what the Resurrected Jesus did the following week. He showed Thomas the scars on His hands, feet and side. Amazingly, His resurrected body showed the scars of the cross. These scars weren’t wounds of failure, but to show the sacrifice needed to arrive at this perfect state. Upon seeing this, Thomas fell to the ground and uttered those famous words: “My Lord and My God.” Thomas never lacked courage and tradition tells us that he would travel to many countries proclaiming the Gospel message. He would eventually travel to India where he was martyred. With Jesus, he and the other disciples would venture out to all parts of the world. They might well have said as they left: “Let us go too and die with him.” Well, Thomas got his wish, even if he had to wait a few years for this to happen.

*Witnessing the Resurrection*

How do we explain the resurrection when we cannot claim to have seen the Risen Christ? Last Sunday, Pope Francis reminded us that our faith in the resurrection wasn’t based on optimism or fate, it is based upon the desire of the Risen Lord to always be in communion with us. Wherever we are, Jesus is there to guide us, to strengthen and to be our sure support. And that has tremendous consequences upon all of us. In this week’s first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we heard how the early community of believers gathered on the 1st day of the week to share in the breaking of the bread. Out of that communion with one another they shared what they had in common and no one went without. That was how much that breaking of the bread transformed those early believers. Our faith and witness to the resurrection is likewise based upon our coming to Mass Sunday after Sunday and likewise sharing in the breaking of the Bread and sharing in the Cup. The Eucharist transforms us so that we can be Christ to each other. In that way, we are giving witness to the resurrection.

Although, we are unable to gather as a community to share in the breaking of the Bread and the sharing of the Cup, we see it happening in the lives of those who risk their own lives for the sake of others. Those in the medical field, the first responders and even those in law enforcement are asked to sacrifice everything in order to save a life. They’re not doing it for the money, nor the acclaim, they are risking their own lives to restore lives. In a sense, they are witnessing to us the Risen Christ who ultimately sacrificed His own life, so that we might live.

During Holy Week, I read an article about a priest in Canada who was a prison chaplain. As the virus was infecting more and more inmates, it became clear that he had to get out of there and wait it out in a safe place until it was clear to return. He chose to remain at his post serving those inmates. No one would have blamed him for getting out of there, but he couldn’t. In his eyes- this was where God placed him and he was committed to giving witness to the Gospel- even if it meant contracting the virus and possibly dying. “He offered to go there and live in the institution 24-7,” said Bishop Gary Gordon of Victoria, British Columbia. “For a bishop to hear that from a priest, you say ‘OK, this is what it’s all about. This is the vocation - lay it on the line.’ It’s really beautiful.” I have yet to hear anything more about this priest and I am certainly interested in hearing of his experience during this very difficult time.

*What can We Learn from this Crisis?*

This time of staying in place has its drawbacks- we are cooped up and going crazy, but there is also time for reflection on the importance of life. As we see and hear of so many willing to sacrifice their lives for others, what about us? How can we sacrifice for the good of one another? And to our many young people who have a life time ahead of them- how will they use the time God has given them to witness to the resurrection? Life isn’t about money and power, it’s about service and self-giving! As they see how others lay down their lives during time of crisis, perhaps God is inspiring them to a life of service in the medical fields or even religious life. By learning from the sacrifices of others, we can be inspired to put service as the forefront of our lives as well.

We continue to pray and do all that is asked of us during this time of crisis. Let us remember those who have died as a result of this virus as well as those who are recovering from it. Let us remember our health care providers and all the stress they are under to comfort and heal those infected. Let also pray that this crisis will end and we will once more gather for the sharing of the Eucharist. Amen, Amen!

*News from the Parish*

This week, we buried Doyle Gietzen and Terry Reeves. These were brief committal services at the cemetery, where there no more than ten members of the family were in attendance. Unfortunately, we are not permitted to celebrate the Mass of Resurrection at this time, however once the stay at home order is lifted, we will offer a Memorial Mass to their families. In the meantime, please remember the families in your prayers.

I would like to thank Janine Lehnert and Colleen Dempz for making some face masks. We have them at the parish office upon request.

I do hope everyone is doing well and I want to thank you for your continued support of the parish. It is gratifying to know how much you care about St. Michael’s parish.

A few weeks ago, I mentioned that we had applied for a loan under the SBA. We received word this past week that we have been approved. That means that this week, we will call back everyone who was laid off and can once more be paid through this money. Not everyone will be on site as many can work from home, but that will come as good news to our employees. Should we prove that the money was used as intended (to bring back our employees) that loan will be forgiven. During this unusual period, I want to thank members of the Finance Council for their counsel and advice.

*From the Holy Father*

During his homily this past weekend, Pope Francis remarked: “May we be profoundly shaken by what is happening all around us, the time has come to eliminate inequalities, to heal the injustice that is undermining the health of the entire human family!”

Pointing to the Gospel reading from John, in which the disciple Thomas does not believe that Jesus had actually appeared, the pope said, “On this feast of Divine Mercy, the most beautiful message comes from Thomas, the disciple who arrived late.”

“He was the only one missing. But the Lord waited for Thomas,” he said, noting that Jesus appeared to the disciples again with Thomas present, allowing Thomas to touch the wounds marking where he had been nailed to the cross.

“Mercy,” he said, “does not abandon those who stay behind.”

Peace…Fr. Tom