

## Touching Christ's Wounds

Sermon for St Thomas's Day, 3 July 2023

St Teresa's Priory (Discalced Carmelite Friars), Varroville NSW

The Reverend Canon Professor Scott Cowdell

Ephesians 2:19-22; Psalm 116:1-2; John 20:24-29

*+In the Name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.*

Thomas as we meet him in John's Gospel comes across as something of a hard-bitten realist. Today's passage has him demanding proof before he'll believe in the resurrection, sounding every bit the suspicious-minded modern empiricist. We've all met this scepticism in our ministries, and even in ourselves. Perhaps this is why Thomas is called the Twin, because so many can recognise him in themselves.

Yet the risen Jesus opens Thomas to a deeper realism, inviting him to touch the wounds of nail and spear. Thomas is shocked and converted. Suddenly he discovers God incarnate on the inside of human suffering, though neither diminished nor defeated by it. Suddenly Thomas's defensive armour, likely hiding his own frailty and fear, can be set aside. Suddenly he believes, and believes fully: "My Lord and my God".

His is no longer the outsider's perspective, with all those who half believe but who can't get past the bitter fact of suffering—who perhaps can't help fearing it for themselves. This recalls the perspective of the stranger and the alien, named in our Ephesians reading today, who've now been brought from the outside of God's working to its inside through the gospel. Thomas couldn't see it, and neither can many half-converted people in our congregations who look on faith from the outside, whose doubts and misunderstandings we know very well. But Jesus invites us to know the history of human suffering, culminating in his own, from a new perspective—to know it in its overcoming, to know it in light of Easter, to know it as a privileged place of intimate contact with God.

In this far-flung outpost of your Irish Province, I can surely end with an Irish joke. The traveller asks a local how to get to Dublin. After a moment's thought comes the reply, "Well, I wouldn't start from here". So it is in the life of faith. The challenges about suffering that sceptical moderns keep raising century in, century out can't readily be resolved in the terms they bring to this debate. But there is a better place to start from. Jesus invites us into a new intimacy with God and hence into a deeper realism about suffering—a realism deeper than scepticism, because our Easter life in Christ has given us a fuller picture. Christianity makes sense from the inside, not from the outside. Hence our place here with Thomas and the risen Jesus, in John's upper room of the Last Supper. Here *we* meet and touch our crucified and risen Lord, reaching out for his broken body.

The Lord be with you . . .