

HOMILY

The Second Sunday of Easter *March 30, 2008*

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A little boy was outside playing. He was doing all the things that a little boy does. He was climbing trees. He was swinging on the swing set. He was rolling and playing with his dog. His mother called him for dinner and all the family gathered at the table. His mother looked at him and said, "Young man, let me see your hands." (There was some rubbing of his hands on his blue jeans before he held them up for inspection.) His mother looked at them and asked, "How many times do I have to tell you that you must wash your hands before you eat? When your hands are dirty, they have germs all over them and you could get sick. After we say the blessing, I want you to march back to the bathroom and **wash** your hands."

Everyone at the table bowed their heads and the father said the blessing. Then the little boy got up and headed away from the table. He stopped, then turned and looked at his mother and said, "Jesus and germs! Jesus and germs! That's all I ever hear around here and I haven't seen a one of them!"

The little boy's story does point out the fact that our hands can be an identifying characteristic. According to the F.B.I., everyone has a different set of fingerprints. We are all different; yet we can be identified by our hands. And the same was true for Jesus.

On that first Easter, Peter and John gathered with the other disciples in that upper room to talk about the empty tomb. As they were talking, Jesus came and stood among them. They were frightened, but Jesus reassured them by showing them his hands and feet.

How often had the disciples seen those hands of Jesus touch blind eyes so that they could see? How often had they seen his hands bless little children? How often had they seen him reach out hands and lift the cripple up and say, "Walk!?" They saw the hands of Jesus and they knew that he was resurrected from the dead.

However, two disciples were absent from the upper room. Judas was dead and Thomas had slipped off alone to grieve the death of Jesus. Thomas was not with the other disciples in the upper room when Jesus appeared among them on that first Easter. When the other disciples told Thomas of the Resurrection, he refused to believe. *“Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, I will not believe.”*

One week later, on the first Sunday after Easter, Thomas received his proof. The disciples, including Thomas, were gathered in the upper room when Jesus appeared in their midst. Jesus knew what was in Thomas’ heart and said, *“Thomas, if it’s proof you want, look at my hands. Look where the nails have been.”* Thomas was overwhelmed. His skepticism and doubt were gone. He fell to his knees and said, *“My Lord and my God!”*

Today, as we look with Thomas at the hands of Jesus, there are two things which I believe his hands say to us. First, the hands of Jesus remind us of his suffering. In our society, we believe that the punishment we give to convicted criminals should not be cruel or inhumane. However, the Romans worked at making their punishment cruel. The victim of a crucifixion literally died a thousand deaths. And so it was with Jesus on the cross. He suffered and died at the hands of the Roman soldiers. Whenever we doubt that suffering, all we have to do is look at his hands. It is his hands which remind us of the suffering he experienced.

I heard a story recently about a little boy who sat staring at his mother’s hands. Finally he asked, “Mama, why are your hands so ugly?” The mother was quiet for a moment. Then she said, “Jason, one day when you were almost three years old, you were playing in the backyard. Some older boys in the neighborhood were playing with matches in the alley. They built a fire and left it burning when they left. You toddled up to the fire and fell. The flames caught your shirt on fire. I heard you screaming. I rushed out of the house; I beat the flames out with my hands. You were scarcely burned but my hands were burned and scarred terribly. That’s why my hands are so ugly.”

The little boy looked up to his mother with a smile on his face and said, “Mama your hands aren’t ugly; they’re beautiful.”

A poet looking at those hands of Jesus wrote:

*They nailed those beautiful, blessed hands
To the cruel, bitter cross.
And there in agony untold
He bore our shame and loss.*

*Beautiful hands of Jesus!
I hope some day to see.
Those wonderful, loving, nail-scathed hands
That were pierced for me on Calvary.*

It is the hands of Jesus which remind us that the cross to Calvary was no picnic. Whenever we doubt that Jesus suffered on the cross, all we have to do is look at his hands. The print of the nails will remind us that “He was wounded for our transgressions.”

A second thought: The hands of Jesus remind us that we are called to act on our faith. Thomas had doubts about the resurrection when he heard the stories of the disciples. His doubts were clear and he said, “*Unless I see his hands myself, I will not believe.*” Thomas was full of doubts and had his mind closed to everything until he was confronted with the Risen Christ. Jesus looked at Thomas and said, “*Thomas, if it’s proof that you want, look at my hands, touch the wounds and stop your doubting.*” Thomas looked at the hands and knew that some response was needed. Instead of touching the wounds, Thomas fell to the ground and said, “*My Lord and my God!*”

Sometimes you have to discard your doubts and act on faith. You may have some lingering doubts. You may have some unanswered questions. You may have things that will remain a mystery. But, like Thomas, we sometimes reach that point where we need to translate our doubts into acts of faith.

Several years ago, someone sent me a card. It has a short little phrase on it. Whenever I am facing a difficult situation or wondering which way I should go, I read the words on the card...

*Faith is walking to the edge of all the light you have...
and taking one more step.*

Faith is coming to that the point where we are standing on the edge of doubt and we can see no clear path ahead, but we go on in faith. We go on in spite of doubts. We go on in the faith that God is with us and that he holds us in the palm of his hands.

Doubts are a reality in our lives. We all have occasional doubts. We all have questions which need answers. We would all like to have absolute proof. But sometimes we need to respond as Thomas did. We need to look at the hands of Jesus and act on our faith by falling on our knees and saying as he did, “*My Lord and my God!*”

Are you ready to act on your faith? Are you ready to take one more step into the unknown future with faith in Jesus Christ?