



Presiding Bishop's Easter Message

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I bid you all a Joyous Eastertide!

A week ago, the House of Bishops and the Executive Council met in Ponce, Puerto Rico for the semi-annual meetings of our national church's governing bodies. It was a wonderful gathering, one that reflected the harmony necessary to transact the temporal and spiritual activities of God's Holy Church.

While in Puerto Rico, I carved out a few hours to tour Ponce, a lovely old city on the south of the island. Ponce has a beautiful art museum and I spent several delightful hours viewing its unique collection. I was drawn to one particular painting and spent some time studying it. Before leaving the museum that day, I spent several more minutes looking at the picture that had caught my attention. Then, last Friday, before traveling to the airport, I visited the museum once again. I wanted to experience that painting for a last time. Clearly, it had captivated me.

The title of the painting was, simply, “Doubting Thomas.” But the Spanish title seems far more evocative; the painting is labeled “Incredulo Tomas.” Thomas does express incredulity in his experience of the risen Christ. Although we know his story well, this work of art, by the Italian painter, Bernardo Strozzi, offered a perspective I had not seen before. In this particular rendering, we observe Thomas from the rear. Thomas kneels before the risen Christ. His profile is partly obscured by shadow, but we can see that he is studying the pierced side of Jesus. Thomas' face seems to be only an inch or two away from the wound made by the Roman's sword. Perhaps we can observe the confusion – the incredulity – in Thomas' expression.

While Thomas' face is partly hidden, the expression of Jesus, who stands above the kneeling Thomas, is clearly revealed. Our Lord's face expresses all the love and forgiveness – and understanding – that is lost on Thomas. Jesus offers His love, His forgiveness and His very life to Thomas and, indeed, to us all. But Thomas does not see the expression on the face of his Lord and God. Thomas doesn't look into the face of God because he is fixated on the scars, the wounds of the Cross.

We do know that Thomas will eventually lift his eyes, that he will see the God of his creation, that he will embrace the resurrected Jesus who has - beyond all human knowing - returned from the dead. Thomas will embrace the living God.

On this Easter, we confront our own fears, our own doubts, our own unbelief. Like Thomas, we may kneel before the resurrected Christ and wonder, incredulous at what has happened in this world and in our hearts. And we may be forgiven if we, too, find the presence of the risen God almost too much to comprehend. But God stands above us, looking down at us with love, giving us all the human time necessary, all the time in the world to lift our eyes to the risen Christ and to know that God is God.

It was just a short time ago that we embraced the Christ child, welcoming God into our hearts. And now we embrace the risen Christ. And through it all, through all that we have done and failed to do, through all of our unbelief and denial and incredulity, we know that, just as there is love at the beginning, there is – incredible as it may seem – love at the last.

Your Brother in Christ,

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