

**Reflection on the Gospel-2nd Sunday of Easter B
(John 20:19-31)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Some of us may remember when we spoke of the Sundays *after* Easter. The terminology has changed and we now speak of the Sundays *of* Easter. In other words, we now recognise that the liturgical readings and prayers for each Sunday between Easter and Pentecost invite us into a different movement of the one great symphony of resurrection faith.

The first scene in today's gospel has the disciples hiding behind closed doors "for fear" of those who had handed Jesus over to be executed by the Roman authorities. Jesus appears among them, offers a greeting of peace, and tells them that he has been sent by God, his "Father". They receive from him the gift of the Holy Spirit. He sends them in turn to bring peace and to mediate the forgiveness of God through the power of the Spirit. In other words, he sends them to create communities of people who listen to one another and who love one another into life. The story invites us as believers to place ourselves in the shoes of the earliest disciples. It invites us to receive the gift of the Spirit, to emerge from behind the doors that close us in on ourselves and that prevent us from rising above the fears that control and even paralyse us. We render the gospel ineffective, even powerless, when we make self-protection our priority.

The second and third scenes in today's gospel focus on Thomas who is not with the other disciples when Jesus first appears in their midst. Thomas is not exactly the trusting type. He seems to trust only his own first hand experience. We all know people like Thomas. They test our patience because they seem to lack imagination. Then they make big statements when they come around to understanding what everyone else has known for a while. If we think, however, that the other disciples are any better than Thomas, we need to note that the doors are still closed eight days down the track! The simple fact of knowing has not dispelled the fears.

Even those of us who do believe and trust need a bit of time and encouragement to take the gospel message to heart. We often need the example and support of others to move out beyond our personal fears and embrace the pain of the wider world. We are asked to do this right now as we ponder the wisdom of being vaccinated against COVID 19. Some are more fearful of the vaccine than of the virus. It may be helpful to look back to today's first reading from Acts (2:32-35) where Luke presents an idealised picture of the post resurrection Jerusalem community: all things in common and the gospel received with great respect. We are called to rise above our own fears and respond with love and generosity in times of crisis, to live the gospel message from death through resurrection and into "ordinary time".