

In the eastern rite churches, who follow the Julian calendar, today is Easter. So in an act of solidarity with them, particularly in an act of prayer with our sisters and brothers in the Ukrainian church, we are joining churches across Canada to ring our bell at noon. It is an act to say that Christ is risen; and to declare that love overcomes fear, and the life overcomes death and destruction.

On the evening of the first day of the week, when the disciples were locked in the upper room, Thomas wasn't there when Jesus appeared. When they gave Thomas their testimony, just like they did not believe Mary's testimony, Thomas did not believe their testimony. Let's understand this clearly, *none* of them believed the verbal testimony, "I have seen the Lord." None of them.

So to keep up with what Mary saw early in the morning; and to keep up with what Peter, James, John, and the others saw that evening, a whole week passes before Jesus appears again. This time, Thomas *was* with them - thank God he was with them. Jesus appears to them and announces what he always announces to his band of friends

who abandoned him, denied him, and deserted him. Jesus's first words were not "Where were you?" or "How dare you!" or "I told you that you would all leave me!" Jesus first words were "Peace." And then he shows them his hands and his side.

His wounds have become vehicles of belief. They are no longer sources of pain, but sources to verify that this is actually him - not a ghost, not a spirit, but a real body. The wounds become signs of recognition.

So a week later, when the resurrected Jesus appears to the disciples when Thomas was there, Jesus issues this extraordinary invitation that Thomas is privileged to receive: "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side."

What an extraordinary invitation. We don't know if Thomas did that, but we do know that the invitation issued and the appearance of Jesus in a resurrected body was sufficient enough for Thomas to fall down and exclaim, "My Lord, and my God!" He now believed the testimony.

This body of Jesus is no normal body, but it is a physical and concrete body. It can be touched. It can eat and digest food. But it is no longer

confined by space and time - things characteristic of this temporal world. As a resurrected body it is something completely new. It is something that comes from eternity. It can appear in locked rooms and disappear. It is in this body that Jesus appeared for fifty days to not just Mary, Peter, James, John, Thomas and the others, but to thousands of people. All of them could then join in Mary's initial testimony to exclaim, "I have *seen* the Lord."

That's what makes them apostles. They were all eyewitnesses to the bodily resurrection of Jesus and it distinguishes us from them. We can never become apostles, because initially like Thomas, we weren't there either. But we can become disciples, followers of the way, *if* we believe their testimony.

"Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have come to believe." That's about us.

And apparently we have been given all the testimonies, all the signs, and all the deeds of power we will ever need to believe. "These things are written that you might come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you might have life in his name."

Matter matters. Jesus in the new creation of a resurrected body is affirming that bodies matter. Creation matters. These fleshy things, these fragile bodies, that bear wounds and are vulnerable to viruses, diseases, and mutating cells; and are subject to pain, abuse and decay; are holy. These bodies which we occupy are sacred gifts and need to be treated as such, because these bodies will also be resurrected in a new creation. It's not just our spirit, or our souls, that live on, but it is our bodies, in a new creation that is no longer under the bondage of death and sin. Because matter matters so much to God, God entered into it, and then became subject to death, and raised Jesus' physical body from the tomb to make a *new* creation. That is what the apostles testify, and that is why we hear the words, "The body of Christ, given for you."

"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen, yet have come to believe."

