

Some of you will remember a time long ago when there was no such thing as cable television, that ancient time before DVDs and VHS tapes. When I was a boy you literally could not record anything on television. So if you wanted to see some-thing, you had to be in front of the television set when they were showing it; otherwise you missed it. When I was a boy there were programs that were broadcast once a year and families marked their calendars so that they could be in front of their black-and-white Zenith television in order to see it. I remember some of those programs the Charlie Brown Christmas special, How the Grinch Stole Christmas & there was always excitement when once a year they put on my favorite movie, The Wizard of Oz. My brother & I put on our pajamas. Mom would make Jiffy Pop popcorn. Dad gave us the same stern reminder every year, remember boys if you have to use the restroom do so during the commercials otherwise you'll miss your favorite parts of the movie. My favorite part of The Wizard of Oz is when Dorothy and her friends meet the wizard for the first time. They see that huge head surrounded by smoke

and flames and the Wizard's voice booms through the hall and the Cowardly Lion shakes with fear. I loved that scene.

But one year as that scene was getting close on TV, my mind had started to wander toward the cookie jar in the kitchen, & I asked my mother if I could have some of those chocolate chip cookies that she had made earlier that day. She said yes but that I should wait till the commercial, "you don't want to miss your favorite part," she said. But I didn't want to wait, so I got up, left my family on the couch and I went to the kitchen. I got some cookies from the cookie jar. Then I remembered that it's impossible to have those cookies without milk. I needed some milk to dunk the cookies in. So I poured myself a glass of milk, took my cookies & finally rejoined my family in the living room, & I dunked a cookie in the milk. I looked at the television. It was a commercial, "please, Mr. Whipple, please don't squeeze the Charmin." My mother said to me, "you missed it. You missed your favorite scene, you should have been here with us.

We all saw it and now you're gonna have to wait until next year to see it” and Mom said, “maybe you'll learn an important lesson.” My heart sank. In those days before video recording, I would indeed have to wait a whole year to see where Dorothy meets the wizard. To add insult to injury just then as this was happening to me, the cookie that I was dunking in the milk, well it broke off and most of it sank to the bottom of the glass. I had to wait a whole year to see what I wanted to see. I did indeed learn some important lessons while I waited that year. One was to always listen to your parents; and the other lesson, not to let distractions, like cookies, take you away from an important family activity.

In today's powerful passage from John's Gospel most of the disciples see something wonderful but one disciple misses it. On the evening of that first Easter Sunday the disciples of Jesus are together. John tells us that they have locked themselves in a room what the leaders had done to Jesus on Good Friday. Perhaps they were frightened that the leaders would come after them next.

They were afraid and they were confused. Mary Magdalen had gone to the tomb and she came back with strange stories of angels, a missing body and a gardener. It was all so confusing. So they were sad & they were scared & they were confused, but they were together. And then they saw it, they saw Him, Jesus risen, standing in their midst, despite the cross, despite the locked doors. He spoke to them of peace and forgiveness. He breathed upon them his spirit. He was somehow alive. They all saw it with their own eyes, except for Thomas. Thomas had left the room. We don't know why. We don't know where he went. What we do know is he was not with them, he was not with those early Christians in their moment of sadness and confusion and fear, and because he was not with them, he missed it. He didn't see Jesus alive and Thomas had to wait. Did you notice that detail in John's Gospel when the others told Thomas that they had seen the Lord? Thomas declared that he would not believe it until he himself saw Jesus with his own eyes, till he touched the wounds in Jesus' body.

That's what Thomas said, and then he had to wait, Monday went by, Tuesday went by. The Gospel tells us that Thomas has to wait an entire week before the risen Lord appears again and when he did appear Thomas saw and believed. "My Lord and my God," Thomas' profession of faith is important but don't forget the fact that Thomas had to wait an entire week. Jesus could have appeared to Thomas and the others at any time which makes me wonder why did the Lord make Thomas wait that long before he appeared to Thomas and the others again. Was there something that he needed to learn during that waiting? Perhaps there was a lesson that he could only learn by waiting. Now we normally don't like to wait. When we pray, in fact, we often hate to wait, especially when we've been nice enough to tell God what we want & how we want it & why we want it & we want God to deliver it on our schedule. Thomas has to wait. Perhaps there was indeed a lesson that Thomas would learn as he waited, and perhaps that lesson was this, if you want to see the risen Lord don't isolate yourself. Think of it this way, **if** Thomas had been with the rest of

the disciples on that first Easter day, he would have seen the risen Lord, but he wasn't there and so he missed it. He has to wait. Then the next Sunday when Thomas was with the Christian community that's when Christ appeared again, and that's where Thomas's doubts are transformed into faith. In many churches this Easter season it's a time when we baptize new members of our communities. On the one hand baptism is a beautiful revelation of the spirit-filled relationship that each of us can have as beloved daughters and sons of God, but baptism is not just a sign of the graced filled relationship between a person and Christ, it's also when each believer is welcomed into the community of the church. You see our journey of faith doesn't take place in isolation. We don't walk to heaven alone. We don't have to ask our questions by ourselves and try to figure out the answers without the help of others. Baptism reveals that we are members of Christ's body, the church. It's here in the community of the church that Christ most often chooses to make his presence known & reveal the beauty of his love, change people's lives, our lives, for the

better, but we won't see it if we're not here together. We may miss it if we're in the kitchen chasing chocolate chip cookies. We'll miss it if we're doing our own thing, or doing our own "spiritual" thing without a brother or sister to walk beside us. Many people today say that they are spiritual, but that they don't need a religion; they don't need a church community. Sure they believe in God, but they somehow think that they don't need to belong to a community of believers. But I think that Thomas learned a different lesson during that long week while he's waiting. Perhaps he had to listen to the other disciples speak with excitement about how the risen Lord looked and what he said and how they felt when they saw him alive that first time. I'm guessing that in some way Thomas might have felt left out because for some reason he had decided on that first Easter Sunday that he didn't need to be there, that is, with his family of faith. But the next week he was there; and so were the other believers; and so was the risen Christ.

Thomas's experience might teach us that we literally cannot survive & flourish as people of faith without other people of faith

around us, to love us, encourage us, teach us, strengthen us, challenge us & share faith with us. The journey to Jesus doesn't happen in isolation. If we live in isolation, whose feet will we wash; if we live in isolation, whose burdens will we help bear; if we live in isolation whose crosses can we help carry; if we live in isolation whose wounds will we dress; if we live in isolation whose tears will we dry; if we live in isolation where will we find twos & threes gathered in the Lord's name; if we live in isolation how will we ever see the risen Lord at work in people who inspire us. He is risen. He is here & we can see him in the community of believers, in a person bathed in the waters of baptism, in bread & wine placed upon a table, in service to our neighbor. There is nothing more important in life than experiencing the Risen one. So don't walk away from the Body, the community where the Risen one has revealed himself for 2,000 years.

You want to see him, don't you? The Risen Christ here in our midst.