

## No doubt: 'Thomas' to perform Saturday

*Mark Price has depicted saints for 25 years*

By CATHY KELLY - For The Californian | MURRIETA:  
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Actor Mark Price gave a performance as St. Thomas during a service Wednesday night at St. Martha's Catholic Parish in Murrieta. (Photo by Don Boomer - Staff photographer)

Mark Price assumes the role of saints.

Specifically, the 52-year-old Alpine resident performs as five saints, four of whom revered in Christianity as apostles of Jesus.

It's a cheeky thing, perhaps, to speak in churches as an apostle, to address the congregation during a sermon. And he is cheeky ---- and dynamic and passionate and encouraging.

Price started acting as a 5-year-old in a Catholic school play. He said he later worked in advertising and ministry at the same time before realizing it was too much and turning to ministry full time 10 years ago.

"I'm a guy who believes that when the door is open, and you feel you have talent or ability to add, you should offer them up," he said.

The people who speak to him after his performances help sustain him, he said. And he believes even those who are not Christian can respect the saints for rising and responding to a calling despite their failings.

Price has been involved in various ministries for 34 years and portraying saints for 25 years. He has spoken and acted at St. Martha's Catholic Parish in Murrieta, St. Vincent Ferrer Catholic Church in Sun City and other area churches at least once a year for the last few years. Last year, he gave 243 presentations at churches and retreat centers around the country, he said.

Price performed Wednesday at St. Martha's, playing St. Thomas, and he will do so again at 6:30 p.m. Saturday; there is no admission fee.

The saint has been referred to as "Doubting Thomas" because in John 20, he insisted on physical proof that Jesus was resurrected from physical death. The phrase is used today to describe skeptics.

St. Martha's Associate Pastor Mike Torretti said he appreciates Price because the performances are entertaining enough to "get through to all."

Wednesday, that seemed to be the case, as Price spoke to about 600 people, most of them in the church's religious education programs. But even the kids sat rapt as "Doubting Thomas" acted out the intense drama of Christian miracles, including the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus.

Derek Morris, 39, who became Catholic at St. Martha's last year and saw Price during that process, came to see him again and said he would not have missed it.

"He humanizes the apostles," he said. "I find it very interesting and enlightening in that sense."

Dressed as Thomas, Price's act was laced with jokes about being labeled as the apostle who insisted he would not believe in the resurrection until he could touch Jesus' wounds.

Has anyone ever made a mistake, he asked, baiting the audience.

Seizing on one woman who raised her hand, he asked her name, in his assumed Arabic accent and strong voice. Jenny, she replied. He then demanded loudly that she give him an example, "just between us."

When she hesitated, he pointed to the man sitting beside her and asked if she always treated him perfectly, and she admitted she did not.

"How would you like it if everyone called you 'Jenny, the one who didn't treat her husband right?'" he asked.

Throughout the performance ---- charged with flourishing hand gestures and kneeling anguish ---- he educated the audience about customs of the time, Bible stories and values, and also dispelled myths.

One Murrieta teen sitting in the back of the church said he thought Price was really good.

"He's memorized everything about the time when God came to earth," 14-year-old Francisco Garduno said. "And he's friendly and very funny."

Addressing the youngsters, Price told them that questioning is a good thing, repeating a theme associated with Thomas, who was also known to ask Jesus repeated questions.

Last month, at St. Vincent Ferrer, he spoke during the sermon and later performed as St. Paul, the follower of Romans first known as Saul who persecuted Christians before becoming an apostle. He addressed a common question of the faithful: Why would God allow bad things to happen?

Early on, he said he had never gotten a good answer to that question and had poured through the Bible several times searching for it. He said he thinks it's the wrong question; that one must ask what good can God see coming from a painful situation. Then forgive, he said, and then help others.

He ended by telling a dramatic story about a couple he had met in the Midwest at the end of a three-day retreat he had helped put on. The couple said they had come seeking direction and were still unsure what to do the following day, when they were headed to witness the execution of the man who had raped and murdered their daughter.

Price told them they must forgive him, he said, and then told the Sun City audience that he didn't sleep that night because he was filled with anguish as to whether he had said the right thing or set them up for failure.

Several days later, the couple called him and reported what had happened, he said. When they confronted the man before the execution, they told him they forgave him, Price said. They added that he could not, or did not, speak. But they saw tears rolling down his cheeks. The couple thanked Price, he said, and told him a weight had been lifted from them.

Later, Price said whenever his ego begins to get into his work he is "hit with heavy stuff" like that and realizes that he is just using the performances to inspire or reinspire all those sitting in the pews coping with their own trials and tribulations.

Sitting on the other side of the altar, Monsignor Ray Kirk stood as Price stepped down. He had encouraged Price years ago.

"There is a example of the student surpassing the teacher," he said, with a smile, before drawing the celebration to a close.