

Easter 2, 2026

Year A

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

Fr. Robert Gaestel

1st Peter 1:3-9

St. John 20:19-31

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

For the longest time, I have called the Second Sunday of Easter, “The Sunday of Second Thoughts. This should not surprise us. Any time we have a very intense experience, afterwards there is a letdown. The dopamine rush subsides. We don’t actually return to normal, but fall below our ordinary emotional baseline and find ourselves somewhat depressed. A choice presents itself. One choice is to try and return ourselves to the state of euphoria. But to do that we need more stimulation than we had before which means that the next letdown will be more pronounced. So, it will be harder to get out of the hole next time. I think we can perceive here, the seed of addiction. The other choice is to use the downturn to understand what the euphoric experience truly means as in, what it really was, and who we now are because of it. Hence, the importance, and actually, the gift of the Sunday of Second Thoughts.

The Sunday of Second Thoughts is always the story of the Apostle St. Thomas who has been given a title that he’s not yet lived down: “The Doubter.” But think about it for a moment. No one believed when they first heard the very first witnesses who said they saw Jesus alive. St. Luke describes how the women on returning from the tomb and telling the apostles what the “two men in dazzling apparel said them, “Their word seemed to the apostles an idle tale and they did not believe them.” So too today, St. Thomas missed the experience and had nothing to go on but what his fellow apostles said. He could have easily said, and maybe he even did say, “Look, I don’t deny that you saw something. I have no problem believing that you did see something. But, whatever you saw, and I mean really saw, it wasn’t the same guy.” That is the question on the Sunday of Second Thoughts. Whatever you saw, was it the same guy? At the end, for St. Thomas and now for us, it was the same guy and not only that.

Did you notice this morning that according to St. John’s Gospel, Jesus’s resurrection, ascension, and bestowal of the Holy Spirit all happened on the same day? For St. John, it all happens at once. The Church Year follows the chronology of St. Luke in his two-volume work the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. For St. Luke, it was not all at once. Instead, there is the day of resurrection followed by 40 days of appearances of the risen Christ until these end at Ascension, followed by a 10-day waiting period until the bestowal of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. For us, the 40 days of Lent are balanced by the 40 days to Ascension. You already know that in the Bible, the number 40 is an expression for a long time. 40 days and 40 nights of the flood, 40 years in the wilderness for the Israelites, and 40 days of temptation for Jesus are not about calendar time, but for those going through such things, it’s as though the time will never end. So, St. Luke’s chronology of 40 days plus 10 means that the time needed for them, and now for us to truly grasp that Jesus is not dead but risen, and what that truly means both for him and for us is: A Long Time and Even Longer.

Now St. John follows the basic Gospel chronology, but for him chronology is background for specific events. He calls these specific events “signs,” whose purpose is to reveal who Jesus really is.

These events as signs are very compressed. Our task is to unpack the events and leave chronological time to take care of itself. St. Augustine once commented on the Wedding at Cana saying that water into wine is something that happens all the time. The water in grapes is transformed into wine over time. Jesus simply transcends the time. For Jesus as for Einstein, time is not absolute.

Looking back to Lent we can see a number of events both small and big. On the Second Sunday of Lent, Jesus said to Nicodemus, “You must be born ‘anothen.’ Meaning “again,” “anew” and “from above.” Not only that, but “born of water and the Spirit.” Nicodemus cries out, “How can this be?” This is just another way of saying, “this can’t be.” But fast forward to Good Friday. “But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and there came out blood and water.” And, “He who has seen it has borne witness. His testimony is true. And he knows that he tells the truth—that you also may believe.” Believe what? Believe the words of the hymn: *Earth and stars and sky and ocean, by that flood from stain are freed*, as in “from above.”

More to the point is another event, this time from the 4th Sunday of Lent, the event of the healing of the man born blind. The pieces are all there, and overshadowing all of it are the words: “Never since the world began has it ever been heard...” Never since the world began has it ever been heard. It’s Nicodemus crying out, “How can this be?” It is God addressing Ezekiel on both the 5th Sunday of Lent, and at the Easter Vigil, “Son of Man, can these bones live?”

The story opens with a heart-rending scene of calamity that never goes away. To allay our terror at the thought of some random, unexpected, and unexplainable disaster befalling us, the normal human response we wish we wouldn’t make, yet we inevitably do make even if we immediately repress and deny it is, “It’s someone’s fault.” Jesus says that no it is not, but it will become a manifestation of the works of God. Jesus doesn’t just say something. Jesus does something. “He spat on the ground, made clay with the spittle and anointed the man’s eyes with it and says, “Go wash.” It’s the water part of “water and the spirit,” echoing even further back to: “But a mist went up from the ground and watered the whole face of the ground. Then God formed the human from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living being.” The man can now see, but what about everyone else? Is this the same guy who used to be blind? What are we seeing here? No, it’s not, but he just looks like him. As the Gospel says, “there was a division among them.” They could neither agree nor be convinced. The guy himself self-identifies not with words people mostly say, “It’s me.” Instead, he self-identifies with words God uses for himself and that Jesus himself uses: “I am.”

Those in authority, those whose opinions count, say unlike the opinion of the parents who are afraid of being canceled, and who self-censor saying only the minimum; those in authority whose opinion counts declare that what you see is not what’s really there because it’s the wrong day of the week. So, no matter what anyone says, “how can this be?” becomes “it can’t be.” And if you keep saying that it is, you’re out of here and the horse you rode in on. Whatever you see or think you see, it’s not the same guy. The same guy is a sinner. He broke the rules. So, the same guy is just like the two others, one on each side of him, and one of whom admitted: “We are receiving the due reward for our deeds.” The same guy is the one who died so quickly that when Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body, “Pilate wondered whether Jesus was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if he was already dead. And when he heard from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph.” In other words, the

same guy was dead, dead, really dead. If the body is no longer in the tomb, then so what? It changes nothing. Wherever he is, he's still dead.

So, St. Thomas was not with them, and neither were we. "Unless I see." Unless I see what? Eyewitness testimony, while good up to a point, needs forensic evidence to confirm that the guy on trial is the same guy who committed the crime, confirming not absolutely, but beyond a reasonable doubt. Forensic evidence: blood type, fingerprints, DNA, and today for St. Thomas, the wounds in the hands and the opening in the side. It's the same guy. It's the same guy who was crucified. It's the same guy alright. It's the same guy and not only that.

St. Thomas does not say, "Oh, it is you! Silly me. These guys have been after me for a long time to upgrade my prescription eye glasses. But there was never enough time in these past three years to stop at Costco." No, St. Thomas gives the most explicit confession of faith in the New Testament, something we won't hear all the apostles say at once and together until Pentecost: "My Lord and my God." It is the same guy, and not only that, but also what got said about in the beginning which not just me Thomas, but all the rest of us standing here never understood. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made." Hence, today's forensic evidence. And now the conclusion. "In him was life," all of it God's and our own. It is the same guy alright. You are what you always are: My Lord and my God.

It's the same guy. But that is not true of us. He may be the same, but we are not. None of us is who and what we always were. But we could have been, and without him we would be. We would always be the same with minor modifications with the passing of time all the way to the bitter end; which can only be the bitter end because it is the loss of absolutely everything. This means that there is no such thing as "dying with dignity." It is the same guy, but not only that. Through Christ risen and with us always, we are changed in a way that time cannot touch, because of the one who is for each of us now and forever, My Lord and my God.