

The Eighth Day

The heart which beats in the body of the Church is the heart of the Risen Lord and it is on this day, the octave day of Easter when such realisation comes to us in all its fulness. It seems perfectly obvious when you look at it, yet the message which this day delivers holds for us a deep and powerful significance which unfolds gradually in our lives as we come eventually to realise its impact. Understanding this octave day unlocks our emotions and opens up for us the truth about the presence of the Risen Lord, the Eucharist, and what it all means for us.

The disciples are gathered, yet one of their company is missing and so in reality their community is a fractured one. They are no longer at ease and they feel afraid and uncertain. They have been bewildered by the events that have taken place, and they feel lost. It is not difficult to transfer such imagery onto our own situations where we too can encounter the fracturing and breaking down of communities, be they small or large. We are all buffeted and battered by the events of situations which we often cannot deal with, and we are left bereft and unable to withstand exactly what has happened to us. Our friendships and relationships buckle as we find ourselves helpless in the wake of whatever awful disaster has befallen us. It is into moments such as these that the Risen Lord comes. Significantly he comes his with wounds still open and with an invitation.

Thomas perhaps feels the most wounded of all the disciples. Remember it was Thomas who said: *Let us also go to die with him* and Thomas knows he has failed. He has seen Jesus die and yet he himself remains alive. He more than anyone else must have felt the cold blast which his words conveyed, and as a result felt unable to face his companions. He is a deeply wounded individual. The Risen Jesus now appears in the midst of this fractured community and invites Thomas to bring his wounded self and to place his woundedness into his hands and side. In other words Jesus offers Thomas and thereby the fractured community of which he is a part, a deep insight into the nature of what Resurrection and Eucharist mean.

When we come to receive the sacrament we too bring our wounds however and in whatever shape or form they appear and we are invited to place them into the wounded but risen body of the Lord. This is a healing and self-enhancing moment and each week it is offered to our world as an expression of what the love of the Risen Christ proposes. When we think about Eucharist and what it gives us, we should understand it as the active love through which the wounds of our lives are healed. But is this how we view it? Do we, in other words value the Eucharist as an ongoing reality in our lives, as a living encounter with the Risen Lord? How willing are we to accept it as such?

It is only slowly, even painstakingly, as we grow and mature in faith, that we come to understand the centrality of this eucharistic healing as the ultimate necessity for the Christian. The doubts of Thomas are set aside once he understands that what he is to receive is so much more than what he expects, for what he receives is insight into who Jesus is and all of what this implies. The weekly participation in the celebration of the octave day is vital for us and as Christians we cannot be Christians without it. The presence of the Risen Lord, who heals our wounds and binds our brokenness is the gift which becomes the heartbeat of the Church.