

## HOMILY FOR SUNDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2020

### Easter 2

#### READING: John 20:19-31

Let's start out with a bit of brain stretching! See if you can work out which of the following are true and which are false? The answers are at the end of the homily, BUT NO CHEATING!!

1. Most lipsticks contain fish scales.
2. More real money is printed in the world than Monopoly money each year.
3. No piece of square paper can be fold more than seven times.
4. The longest recorded flight of a chicken is 13 seconds.
5. The Kea bird (New Zealand) likes to eat the strips of rubber around car windows.
6. The weight of all the termites in the world is ten times heavier than the weight of all the world's humans put together.
7. The longest bout of hiccups lasted about ten years.
8. Toenails grow faster than fingernails.
9. The world's oldest piece of chewing gum is over 9000 years old.
10. Slugs have no teeth.

Some things are very difficult to believe because they sound strange or appear odd. Even though some things sound unbelievable, it doesn't mean to say they are not true.

We can have real troubles believing that something is true, even when it is, when it seems unlikely or unbelievable. If you have ever had the experience of something absolutely wonderful or unexpected happen to you, you will know exactly what I mean.

One of the times that this happened to me was when I was left a house by one of my aunts. I had not expected this at all. I was profoundly shocked and did not really believe it. I kept thinking that somehow someone would discover that this was a mistake. It was only when I had the house deeds in my hand that I really believed it was true!

And I certainly have met couples who were newly and wildly in love. I'm sure you've met them, too. They have been incredibly happy, but also rather mystified. They often say, "I never expected this to happen to me!" And "I can't believe that someone wonderful loves me as much as I love them, I have to pinch myself to make sure that I'm not dreaming." In time the truth of their relationship will be revealed, and the sense of surprise will recede.

I guess then, that it was no surprise that many people struggled to believe that Jesus was alive and had been raised on Easter Day. This struggle to believe the reality of the resurrection continued in the days that followed.

Even those who saw him didn't necessarily recognise him when they first saw him. Mary Magdalene, after all, thought he was one of the gardeners, and only recognised him when he addressed her by name. The disciples on the road to Emmaus had a long conversation about the Easter events with a man that they thought was a stranger, without ever realising it was the risen Jesus. It was only when he broke bread in their house that they suddenly knew that it was him. The other disciples didn't believe the testimony of Mary Magdalene and the other women when they came on the Sunday morning and told them that Jesus was risen. They only came to believe when Jesus stood in front of them as they huddled in the locked room.

Even then, I'm sure they were still struggling to fully comprehend that it really was him, and that he was alive!

Now, there is evidence that Jesus was in some way changed through the resurrection experience. He certainly does things that normal people are unable to do. For example, he appears and disappears from people's sight, and he goes through the walls of the room as if they weren't there. He is no longer limited by his human physical body, but none the less he wears the very obvious physical scars of his ordeal. His hands, his feet and his side bear the wounds inflicted upon him in the barbaric ordeal of the crucifixion. But

his voice is unchanged, as his teaching with authority. And, after the initial shock has worn off, those who knew him before are once again able to recognise him.

But the greatest barrier to their recognition was probably not any changes Jesus had undergone, but rather the whole sheer impossibility of the idea that he could have been raised.

Let's face it. When someone dies, we expect them to remain dead. That is why we grieve. We grieve because death is so permanent, so irreversible. The people of Jesus' time knew this as much as we do. Therefore, there was no way that they ever expected to see Jesus again this side of heaven. Yes, Jesus had taught them about his coming death and resurrection, but let's face it, they hadn't understood what he was talking about.

It was only as time went on and they had time to reflect back and think about what he had taught them, that they remembered and reinterpreted his teachings to make sense of what had happened. But, at the time when Jesus first appeared to the disciples in that locked room this new reality is scary and nigh on incomprehensible, even for those who were present. Rather than be critical of Thomas' struggle to believe, we should be sympathetic, realising that we, too, would probably have been fearful and doubting.

What we would have to hope would be that we, too, would respond in faith, like Thomas did (My Lord and my God!) when Jesus stood in front of him. For the doubts don't matter. What matters is where the doubts take us. For honest doubts can take us on journeys of exploration of our relationship with God, as long as we are open to God speaking to us and leading us. The questions we ask of God can help us go deeper in our faith understandings, and as we sit with our doubts and questions, we can also help others to work through their questions and doubts. As Alfred Lord Tennyson said, "There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds."

This is true, I believe, for the faith that survives testing and doubt is a strong and true faith. Whereas unquestioning faith can sometimes be swept away by one of the storms of life because it was not rooted deep by testing. I hope that when you experience doubts or have questions about your faith that you don't feel guilty or inferior to those who may seem more assured in their faith. God honours every mustard seed of faith, and loves each regardless. For as Jesus came to Thomas to dispel his doubts, and treated him lovingly as he guided him to the truth, he will also come to you to shine the light of his presence in your life.

And furthermore, Jesus will always love you and care for you, even when you doubt, even when you fear, even when you can't feel that love, even after death. His love for you will still be there to the end of time. This is the promise of the resurrection, that God loves us so much that God gave his only precious Son in order that we might experience God's love and forgiveness for ever.

To finish, a little humour on a heavenly theme.

A minister and a taxi driver both died and went to heaven. St. Peter was at the Pearly gates waiting for them. 'Come with me', said St. Peter to the taxi driver. The taxi driver did as he was told and followed St. Peter to a mansion. It had anything you could imagine from a bowling alley to an Olympic size pool.

'Wow, thank you', said the taxi driver.

Next, St. Peter led the minister to a rugged old shack with a bunk bed and a little old television set. 'Wait, I think you are a little mixed up', said the minister. 'Shouldn't I be the one who gets the mansion? After all I was a minister, went to church every day, and preached God's word.'

'Yes, that's true. But during your sermons people slept. When the taxi driver drove, everyone prayed.'

Amen.

Answers: 1. True 2. False, more Monopoly money is printed than real money 3. True 4. True 5. True 6. True 7. False Charles Osborne had hiccups for 69 years. 8. False. Fingernails grow four times faster than toenails. 9. True 10. False, slugs have an average 27,000 teeth!