

This is a live stream service of Holy Communion on the Second Sunday of Easter, on which we remember with gratitude the life and service of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh. To watch at 11am:Â

The Archbishop of York preaches at the Eucharist for the Second Sunday of Easter following the death of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh.Â His sermon follows in full:

âJesus said to Thomas, âHave you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.ââ  
(John 20. 29)

There are one or two places in Johnâs Gospel, where Jesus seems to speak directly to those beyond the other characters in the narrative itself. This shouldnât surprise us.Â

In Johnâs Gospel, especially, the story of Jesusâ earthly ministry and the story of the Risen Christ who is with us and among us through the Spirit is told as a single story. This is what makes it so astonishing and so beautiful.Â

Those long discourses on what it means for Christ to be the bread of life, and particularly the things that Jesus says and the prayer he offers on the night before he dies, represent the mountain peaks of scripture, where Christ himself, the one who dwells close to the Fatherâs heart, and the one who has come to share the human heart, speaks to our hearts directly.Â

Even so, there are these moments where Christ reaches out to us even more unswervingly, encouraging us in our faith and strengthening us in our discipleship.Â

Todayâs gospel reading is one such moment. Indeed, when I used to preach on this text at confirmation services I would say to those about to be confirmed: did they know that they were specifically mentioned in the gospels, and that this was the point where Jesus was very definitely speaking to them.

And Thomas, who really doesnât deserve the epithet âdoubtingâ that heâs forever burdened with, because his response in this instance - and so many others - is actually so like our own, provides the moment where through addressing Thomas, Jesus addresses each one of us.Â

Because, like us, Thomas wasnât there on that first Easter evening. He didnât see and experience what the other disciples saw and experienced. And he declares, quite understandably, that he cannot believe until he sees for himself. He needs some proof.

And Jesus appears to them again. And he reaches out to Thomas. And he says to Thomas, âPut your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.âÂ

And, then when Thomas cries in astonished belief that Jesus is his Lord and his God, Jesus speaks to him again, and at the same time speaks to every one of us: "Thomas, have you believed because you've seen? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Jesus is speaking to us. He is reaching down through the centuries; or perhaps it would be better to note that every moment of human history is equidistant from God's eternity and from the resurrection of Jesus Christ, where the eternity that awaits us breaks into chronological time, and Jesus says to us assembled here in York Minster on the 11th of April 2021 at 11.21am that you, each one of you, whoever you are and wherever you're from, whatever you've done, and whatever you haven't done, is more blessed than the apostle Thomas, more blessed than the apostle Peter, more blessed than Andrew, James and John because you have not seen and yet believe.

And, today, we also gather at a time of national mourning following the death of His Royal Highness Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, a man the Queen described as "her rock"; which I suppose means that she found in him a strength and a dependability and a security, even a foundation, upon which life could be built. And we all know, that the most extravagantly beautiful buildings require the firmest foundations.

What the Queen has achieved through a lifetime of service has been built upon the foundation of a marriage, and to a man whose own values and character were formed, first through exile and then through the turmoil of war.

Many things have been said about Prince Philip in the past few days, but one thing above others may be worth dwelling on as the Christian community in this land, is that the country that Philip served so faithfully was his adopted home. And I wonder whether he could serve and become part of an adopted home, because his life was also formed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, who when he stood among his disciples on that first Easter day, and when in reaching out to Thomas reached out to each one of us, was forming a new household and a new humanity where the old boundaries and divisions no longer count, and where we discover that we are one humanity, even sisters and brothers to each other and to the Earth itself, with all the joys, challenges and responsibilities that go with it.

Thomas cried out "My Lord and My God, because he saw in Jesus the new human destiny which is the Christian hope, the hope in which we commend Prince Philip and all who have died to the mercy and keeping of God, but also the new humanity, the new way of inhabiting the Earth now. Or as the hymn puts it: There is another country! whose fortress is a faithful heart! whose pride is suffering! whose ways are ways of gentleness, and whose paths are peace.

One last thing: this reading from St John's Gospel ends by saying that these things are written down so that we - we who haven't seen, who do not have the proof that was available to Peter and Thomas - may believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that through believing have life in his name.

That's us! The people of God who, like Thomas, know doubt and fear; who haven't got it all worked out; who sometimes falter and stumble; whose faith, sometimes, feels very small. And yet believe; and throw ourselves on the goodness and mercy of God; and ask that God will take the little, smouldering embers of our faith and fan it into flaming life; and are, therefore, amazingly, more blessed than the apostles.

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## Documents

- [THE EUCHARIST FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER](https://www.archbishopofyork.org/speaking-and-writing/eucharist-second-sunday-easter) (166.5 KB)

5 min read

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