

**“He bled for you.”** (Homily)

Deacon John Fulton, St. Kevin Roman Catholic Church, Warwick, Rhode Island  
April 28, 2019 -- 2nd Sunday of Easter -- John 20:19-31

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I went to confession the other day. It was the morning of Holy Saturday. Perhaps because I made my confession during the Triduum this year, I was especially struck as my confessor began reciting the words of absolution: “*God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of His Son has reconciled the world to himself.*”

As I headed off to do my penance, the words, “*through the death of His Son,*” echoed in my mind and in my heart. It was as if I had never heard these words before. (But of course I had—many times!)

“*Through the death of His [...] Son.*”

And once again, I was reminded that God’s mercy is not cheap, that the mercy I had just received was not merited by my petty sacrifices, but by my Lord’s one, great sacrifice.

But I did not always know this!

I did not always appreciate the Lord’s sacrifice. Perhaps I wasn’t taught correctly, or perhaps I just didn’t listen, or perhaps I just kept getting distracted, but most certainly, I did not always appreciate the Lord’s sacrifice. I didn’t understand it. I didn’t feel it. I didn’t honor it. But the Lord noticed me, in my ignorance—a wayward lamb!—and for reasons that escape me, left the ninety-nine, and sought me out.

It is said of the Lord that he works in strange ways. Indeed he does! But the key word here is not “strange.” It is “works.” The Lord “works.” He has a plan, a plan for each and every one of us: *a path marked with His own blood*, for me—and for you—to follow. And when we stray, He seeks us out, and brings us back in ways *we* call strange.

Such as the time I was called to be a deacon.

It was the Spring of 2009: Lent. I had been accepted into the diaconate formation program in December of '08 with 23 brothers. We were about three months into the first of four years of intensive prayer and study. The goal of the first year is *discernment*, a time of reflection on one’s life as it was, as it is, and what it might be—were one to stay the course. It is a year of exploration and of questioning.

Deacons are called to a life of service, not as a way to provide for ourselves and our families, but service over and above those provisions, *new* demands fit into the normal demands of busy modern lives. “The” question is one of self-sacrifice. Can I do it? And yet more importantly: *Will I? Will I do it?*

Now, I had worked towards this challenge for years, having gone back to college in '05 to study theology. I had learned to fit work, family, study, and prayer into a busy, but productive life. The Lord had been very good to me: I had health, a good job, and a loving, faithful wife. Nevertheless, holy orders is different. Saying, “Yes,” to the bishop, to the Lord and His Church, is different from taking a course.

You can drop a course. The Lord is harder to drop!

So in Lent of '09 I meditated on this difference, as I had been asked to do by my formation masters. I knew the Lord was calling me. I knew the Lord had been good to me. But I wasn’t sure I was “*all in.*” I thought about what I’d have to give up. I thought about opportunities to be lost. I thought about old commitments, and new commitments, and unforeseen commitments, and I began to question.

But the Lord watches. He seeks us out—as He sought out Thomas in today’s Gospel. He calls us back to himself, and this He did with me, one Tuesday in Lent.

In 2009, I was extraordinary minister of the Eucharist at St. Clement Church on Tuesdays. And so, on that Tuesday, at the appointed time in holy Mass, I went to the altar and received a *ciborium*. I had been

taught to place my hand over the *ciborium* as I carried the Lord to the congregation—lest I spill any hosts—and this I did that morning. As the first communicant approached me, I uncovered the *ciborium* and lifted up a host.

*It was speckled with blood.* Tiny, sharp, bright red speckles of blood.

I caught my breath as I lay the host on the tongue of my fellow parishioner. I lifted another host. It, too, was speckled, as was the next, and the next, and the next. I was shaking by the time I returned to the altar. Looking down into the *ciborium*, all the remaining hosts were pure white. I went back to my pew and prayed. And as I prayed, these words came to me: *"My suffering was real. I bled for you. I bled for you and for many, that they might live. Now come, follow me."*

Who knows? Perhaps Thomas—after his encounter with the Lord—heard the same words?

The Lord works in strange ways!

Remember: God's mercy is not cheap. *He bled for you.*

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### **John 20:19-31**

On the evening of that first day of the week,  
when the doors were locked, where the disciples were,  
for fear of the Jews,  
Jesus came and stood in their midst  
and said to them, "Peace be with you."  
When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.  
The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.  
Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.  
As the Father has sent me, so I send you."  
And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them,  
"Receive the Holy Spirit.  
Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them,  
and whose sins you retain are retained."

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve,  
was not with them when Jesus came.  
So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord."  
But he said to them,  
"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands  
and put my finger into the nailmarks  
and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

Now a week later his disciples were again inside  
and Thomas was with them.  
Jesus came, although the doors were locked,  
and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you."  
Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands,  
and bring your hand and put it into my side,  
and do not be unbelieving, but believe."  
Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!"  
Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me?  
Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples  
that are not written in this book.

But these are written that you may come to believe  
that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,  
and that through this belief you may have life in his name.