

I'm just back from my niece's wedding in St. Louis, where we had a beautiful celebration at the old cathedral with our family and friends. As with most any wedding, people dressed up for the occasion. In our culture, wearing something nice makes an event special, and wearing something new makes it even more so. If the wedding is the first time you wear a particular outfit – or the only time you wear it – both the clothes and the occasion stand out in your mind. The women in my family convinced my 89-year old mother that she had to wear a new dress to the wedding. She looked great. Everyone did.

In most churches, apart from weddings, the one occasion when it seems most people dress up is Easter. The feast is so big it calls for something special, even something new. The change in seasons connects blossoming life around us to the resurrected life that awaits us. One way we make Easter special is to dress up for it.

Whenever we celebrate baptism, but especially at the Easter Vigil, we present a white garment to the newly baptized. It is white because, according to many passages in the bible, that is the color of the clothing people wear in heaven. It shows up in the Transfiguration of Jesus, in many scenes from the Book of Revelation, and in Old Testament prophecies. In the gospel of this past Easter Sunday, when the women go to the tomb, they find it empty except for a young man sitting inside, who announces the resurrection. What is he wearing? White.

We also have a tradition that girls wear white for their first communion. It is not required; they can receive communion wearing purple and green stripes if they want, but it is customary to see white. Some people think the first communion dress relates to the baptismal garment, and that could be, but I think it evolved a bridal dress for those who are uniting themselves with Christ in the banquet of the eucharist.

Perhaps Jesus was wearing white when he appeared after the resurrection, but today's gospel is not concerned with what covers his skin, but what dents his skin, the holes in his hands, his feet and his side. Thomas would not have been convinced if he had just seen Jesus dressed in white. He needed to touch something in order to have faith.

We all know the feeling. We often ask God to act in some concrete way – let us see some improvement, hear some particular words from someone, feel better health, or touch the hand of someone we've been longing to love. We know just what Thomas felt. Yet we have experienced Jesus in concrete ways – in the faith others share, the love we have given and received, the privacy of our prayers, and the joy of the eucharist. We have touched Christ, felt him, seen him, tasted him, and heard his voice in our hearts.

When we dwell in faith, Christ sees us in our baptismal garments, the sign of the resurrection that awaits us. At the end of our days, when our coffin enters the church, it will be covered in the same way – with a white cloth. It is the garment of our baptism, and the uniform we wear to enter heaven. White is a sign of our joy and a sign of our faith.