

Doubt or Faith. Thomas. Sermon: Easter 2C. STG. Text:  
John 20:19-31 Fr. Hugh 4.11.10

+++++

A man got the job that he'd been working for all his life. Finally he became a CEO.

On his first day at the new corporation he wanted to make a powerful first impression and show everyone who was in charge. He decided to find a couple of people who were slacking off and publicly fire them. That would shake things up a bit.

He went down to the office floor. Everyone there appeared to be working, except for one young man who was leaning against a wall with his hands in his pockets. He went up to him and in a loud voice he asked, "How much money do you make a week?"

The young man looked a bit surprised by the question, but he answered,

“I make five hundred dollars a week.”

The CEO took out his wallet and pulled out ten one hundred dollar bills. He said,

“Here’s a thousand dollars – that’s two week’s pay. Get out of here and don’t come back.”

The young man said nothing and headed out the door. Feeling charged up from his first public firing the CEO turned around and asked loudly, “Can anyone tell me what this goof off did around here?”

There was a long pause. He said, “Come on. Somebody tell me.” A secretary raised her hand,

“Sir. He was the Pizza delivery guy.”

Our gospel reading for today tells of two of Jesus's appearances after His Resurrection from the dead. The fact that Jesus actually met with His disciples after He had been raised from death is enormously significant. How they responded to these appearances, and how we choose to respond to them is also enormously significant.

Jesus made four appearances to His Disciples on the day of His Resurrection. The first was in the morning when He appeared to Mary by the tomb.

Mary and the other women went to tell the disciples, but they wouldn't believe them, and in a sexist manner, they dismissed it as the over-emotional fantasizing of grieving women.

Then two of the disciples were walking to a small town called Emmaus that afternoon, when Jesus appeared to them.

Suddenly believing, and with a new surge of energy, these two men promptly turned around and walked back seven miles as fast as they could.

When they got to Jerusalem they learned that Jesus had also appeared to Peter. So that made three separate appearances, but still not all of the disciples were willing to credit this miracle.

After all, it just seemed to be beyond belief.

Then, as they all sat together in a locked room, talking about these three encounters, Jesus appeared again to all of them.

To convince them that He was real, He showed them His wounds, and He ate a little of their food.

Now it just so happened that one disciple missed out on all four of these Easter day appearances, and that was Thomas.

Thomas is well known by the rather patronizing title of “doubting Thomas” for his part in this story. But if we leave it at that, we miss a great deal of what we could learn from Jesus’s interactions with him.

None of the others who had been told that first day had believed immediately.

They all took a while to accept this extraordinary miracle of Jesus’ resurrection.

Thomas wasn't any different from anyone else.

He had a "Show me" attitude.

And he said "I'll believe it when I see it."

Thomas was not the kind of person who would be impressed with being told, 'the check is in the mail.'

I had a friend just like that. In a former parish a woman came to see me about her husband Ralph who had a bad problem with drugs and alcohol. She and Khara and I prayed for God's intervention.

About a month later Ralph was outside his house and he walked to the top of a small rise.

He raised his fist at God and shouted, "God if you're real, you better show me."

Well, God did show him. A few seconds later Ralph was struck by lightning. Seriously. He lay on the ground in the rain, for he never did know how long.

The next day Ralph asked to talk to me and he said he wanted me to come to his house. When I got there he took me up that rise and showed me the circle of grass that had been burnt and blackened by the lightning.

A few days later Ralph checked into rehab and he never had another drink nor took another drug.

We became friends. Ralph went from doubt and disbelief to optimism and belief.

Thirteen years later Ralph died. His spirit was strong but his health suffered from his many years of drug abuse. When he was in hospital he refused all pain medication. He said,

“I’ve wasted too much of my life being stoned.

I’m not going to be stoned when I meet my Lord.”

Back to Thomas who also challenged God with, “Show me.” It’s interesting how Jesus dealt with him. He didn’t put him down for his lack of Faith.

He did reproach him, yes, but in a gentle way, with the clear intention of restoring his Faith.

Jesus showed him His wounds and gave him the opportunity to touch them if he wanted to.

There is a world of difference between the closed-mindedness of cynicism and disbelief, and the open-mindedness of questioning and the desire for proof. Jesus gave Thomas the gift of proof, just as He had already shown the others.

In so doing, Jesus was saying that it's alright to have honest doubts. Doubt isn't necessarily the opposite of faith. It can be a part of the journey to faith.

It's an opportunity for learning. All the apostles and the saints throughout the ages went through times of doubt.

In the final analysis men and women might say 'seeing is believing' but God says 'believing is seeing.'

A grandmother drove her two grandchildren through Pennsylvania Amish country. Her five year old grandson asked “Why don’t they use cars?”

His seven year old sister said, “Because they don’t believe in cars.”

Her brother looked puzzled for a moment and then said, “Why? Can’t they see them?”

Many of us are like Thomas. We want further proof.

We wonder - we question - we have doubts.

Our faith is not constant, but tends to wax and wane, and sometimes we want some extra reassurance.

Up until that point Thomas had looked at life through a sense-based world view. He insisted on empirical evidence that was observable.

He had the modern perspective that only what can be seen and measured is real.

He wasn't much different from many reasonably intelligent people today. A lot of us are only willing to believe what we can know through our senses. We like objective evidence.

Others of us base what we believe on our feelings, on our subjective experience.

We feel a need for internal evidence – for feelings. If we feel God's presence - if we sense God's guidance, our Faith increases.

The more we find internal evidence for God the more strongly we experience our faith.

The problem though is when we don't sense God's presence our faith diminishes.

There is of course nothing wrong with evidence. It is absolutely fine to develop Faith through encountering objective evidence.

But when evidence is not apparent, does your faith disappear?

It is perfectly fine to develop Faith through internal evidence, through sensing God's presence.

But when the feelings are absent does your faith evaporate?

We all apply faith every day without realizing it.

When you go to a restaurant and order something, you have faith that you will get a plate of food and that you will not get food-poisoning.

Most of the time that faith is rewarded.

What about flying? I've seen all those diagrams about air flow, thrust and so on. But it's still basically illogical to believe that a machine that's as big as a whale and weighs hundreds of tons can fly through the air and land you safely on the ground in another city.

But every time you get on a plane you are showing faith that you believe the plane will transport you safely to your destination.

When you go to the pharmacist to pick up your medication you have faith that the pharmacist will in fact give you the pills you have been prescribed and not give you some other pills like say LSD that would cause you to have bizarre hallucinations.

Faith is putting belief into action. We apply faith every day in hundreds of ways. If you can put your faith in your waiter, your pharmacist, or your airline pilots, why not put your faith in the Lord?

It helps to believe your beliefs and to doubt your doubts.

Neither objective evidence nor personal feelings are the ultimate basis for Faith.

Faith is not dependent on anything external or internal. Faith is contingent only upon who God is.

Ultimately we have Faith by having Faith.

We may think “show me and I’ll believe”,  
but Christ says “Believe me and I’ll show you.”

Jesus said to Thomas:

“Have you believed because you have seen me?

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet  
believe.”

We are really blessed when we get to the place  
where our Faith is not changed by any changes in  
our circumstances.

Having doubts is OK. But what is important as a modern disciple of Christ is to keep on trying to resolve those doubts and to move past them.

We can decide to go about our daily living, with our whole attitude to life based in Faith.

Why not decide today to “believe your beliefs and doubt your doubts”?