

Second Sunday of Easter A - Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.

April 19, 2020

The Sunday after Easter always presents the **Gospel of Doubting Thomas** (John 20:19-31) The reasoning is that the events took place one week after the Lord rose from the dead. A deeper reason, though, is that our belief in the Resurrection is based on our faith. We have faith that Jesus fulfilled the Scriptural prophecies and as the Suffering Servant he would be raised up. We have faith in those who witnessed His resurrection and testified to it: Peter and the other ten, Mary Magdalene and the women who had been at the tomb and many other disciples like those on the road to Emmaus, who proclaimed that they had seen the Lord.

The incident in this Sunday is not the first one where “doubting” Thomas puts his foot in his mouth. As Jesus was preparing for his arrest and death, he told the disciples about the place where he is going, Thomas said, **“Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”** (John 14:4-5). John’s gospel portrays Thomas as a very concrete thinker. He needs specific directions and clear goals. His demand for proof that Jesus had risen has given him the nickname “Doubting Thomas.” But I don’t see Thomas as a doubter. I see him as a person whose faith is strengthened by his visible, tangible experiences of God. Like Thomas our own faith journey also has its high points and low points, from enthusiasm to questioning to doubting to humbly confessing. With ups and downs in our lives, we experience sufferings of illness, unemployment, death of love ones, many of us doubt: Where is God? Does He really exist? Even the saints are not exempted. We will not be free from doubts until we see God face to face.

There is a legend about the great Catholic intellectual theologian St. Augustine. Once he was walking on the beach, contemplating the nature of the Holy Trinity which he had been working on for over thirty years trying to explain the rationality of it for people to understand. As he was walking along the beach, he saw a boy running back and forth from the ocean carrying water in a seashell, and dropping the water in a little hole in the sand not too far off. *“My boy,”* said St. Augustine. *“What are you doing?”* *“I am trying to bring the sea into this hole!”* the boy said with a big smile. St. Augustine looked at the hole, which was tiny, and said, *“But that is impossible, my dear child. The hole cannot contain all that water. It is too small.”* *“It is no more impossible than what you are trying to do — comprehend the immensity of the mystery of the Holy Trinity with your small mind!”* St. Augustine stopped, glanced away, surprised by the boy’s response. When he turned back, the boy had vanished. Some say the child was an angel sent by God to give St. Augustine a reality check. Maybe that’s why one of his favourite saying is: ***“Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.”***

We have many challenges to our faith that are beyond our capabilities to know and understand. In our contemporary world where we can always go to Google for an answer, we realize that some answers can only be provided by God, such as the mystery of the Trinity, or the Divinity and Humanity of Christ, or why Christ died for us. We become doubters because we find it hard to accept that our minds are limited. It takes a tremendous amount of humility to have faith. Having faith demands a recognition that we do not have all the answers to the questions of life, let alone of God. But Jesus tells us that those who believe without such a concrete experience are blessed because it is through believing that we enter into a relationship with Christ and enjoy the new life which he offers us. I, like Thomas, am a concrete thinker looking for those tangible, audible, visible signs that tell me that *“The Lord is Risen!”*, so that I may reply with all my heart, *“Alleluia! He is risen indeed.”* I know if I choose, I can find the risen Lord in so many places. How do we touch the resurrection? We share Thomas’s experience

every time we recognize that sin and death and brokenness are not the final word though they are real. For the one who dies, it seems like there is no hope. For those who mourn, it seems there is no end to the grieving. But Jesus' death and resurrection tell us something different. Every time when good conquers evil, we have the opportunity to see that life wins over death. In my own life, I have touched resurrection. No matter how painful the sufferings, no matter how little the chance statistically for me to survive the cancer, the stroke, no matter how sinful I am, when I open my eyes every day, I see new hope. The power of God's love for his broken and sinful people like me has brought life into situations where it seems only death was visible. And as we use our senses to find the risen Jesus in our midst, we raise our voice with Thomas in the joyful proclamation: "**My Lord and my God!**"

This Sunday is also the **Divine Mercy Sunday**. On the Second Sunday of Easter of the Jubilee Year, at the Mass for the Canonization of St. Faustina Kowalska, Pope John Paul II declared the Sunday after Easter be called "Divine Mercy Sunday." St. Faustina, a Polish nun, received visions from Jesus wearing a white garment with beams of red and white coming from His heart, which came to be known as the image of Divine Mercy. Divine Mercy Sunday focuses on the gift of mercy and love through Christ's death and resurrection. As Pope John Paul II stated, "**Divine Mercy reaches human beings through the heart of Christ crucified.**" After so many months, we are still in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. Both President Trump and Prime Minister Trudeau said that we are seeing the end of the tunnel. But are we in the tunnel yet? How long is the tunnel, 1km, 10km, 100km ...? Some of us may even doubt whether it will ever end. But remember what St Leo the Great said, "**The Cross of Christ is the true ground and chief cause of Christian hope.**"

Bishop Barren in one of his Holy Week daily reflection said "*The coronavirus is like the stone blocking the tomb keeping all of us inside in despair, fear, and gloomy darkness.*" Remember last Sunday's Gospel reading (Matthew 28:1-3): "**After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.**" Let's pray that the angels: the front-line workers, doctors, nurses, medical researchers, scientists, etc. will work perseveringly to remove the stone to enable us to come out of the darkness to see the light of hope. Maybe we spend 15 quiet minutes every day to pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet especially during this time of the Coronavirus pandemic. **For the sake of his sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world. "May Christ dispel the darkness of our suffering humanity."** (Pope Francis 'Easter blessing)