

24 April 2022, The 2nd Sunday of Easter: John 20:19-31

Today I will not refer to “Doubting Thomas.” Thomas-the-Doubter is sometimes propped up as poster boy for ‘skeptical Christians’—those for whom incredulity and suspicion are valued more than wonderment and trust. A disbelieving “saint” may be handy, but Thomas does not qualify. The obvious point of the Gospel is not Thomas’ doubt. Narrowly focusing on his demand for proof rather than his bold faith is wildly inaccurate, even misleading; roughly akin to always referring to Abraham Lincoln as a failed politician, which he most certainly was before 1864.

In a similar yet greater way it is with Thomas. He boasted he would not believe ...*unless I put my finger in the holes, and my hand in his side...* This is more than doubt; this is active disbelief in the absence of verifiable evidence. When Jesus does appear to his followers something extraordinary happens, or more accurately does not happen: Thomas abandons his desire for proof. Jesus’ presence is enough. Is it not strange that no one fainted; no one gasped, no one ran from the building screaming. His presence was enough, and it was obviously an experience of comfort, reassurance, and joy. They had all previously abandoned him; what guilt and shame they must have known. Yet His presence healed all of that. Thomas utters the greatest statement of faith in Jesus found in the Scriptures: *My Lord and my God!*

To make the message explicit the Gospel writer gives us Jesus’ view of things: *Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe.* Why are we who have never seen the resurrected Jesus as blessed as those in that room who did? It goes back to love. We love Jesus because we know we are loved by Jesus—love answering love. In this way we are united with those in that long ago room and share in the joy and wonder of Jesus’ resurrection. We can list some of the reasons we know we are loved by Him, but ultimately it is beyond reasoning. We simply accept it is so; we base our lives, our identities, our choices on Christ’s love for us. Because we are human, we vacillate, we doubt at times, we forget, we flirt with falling away (and sometimes do); yet the pattern of our lives reveals our faith, the not-entirely-rational assumption of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ and our desire to answer such love with love.

I suspect those who want definitive proof for faith in Jesus live in daily disappointment. What Jesus gives us is a daily relationship with Him that is much more satisfying than proof. But we must want relationship in more than a rational way. We must want it with the core of our being. There is a test of our sincerity on this point. To want someone at the core of our being means we are willing to change. I suspect those who want proof for God fear this most of all. It is simply the case that we will be changed by loving another. Love makes us at once both vulnerable and expectant. And the fruit of love is growth, development, change: spiritual and emotional maturity. Think of a person whom you deeply love. Would not fear, suspicion, cynicism, distrust, and demands that they once-for-all prove their love wound and spoil that relationship? Think of this person you dearly love; has not your relationship with her/him changed you? Relationship with God in Christ changes us even more.

We are shown what God’s transforming love will do for us and to us: As revealed earlier in the Gospel reading: we will receive and know peace, God’s peace which the world cannot give. We will be inbreathed with God’s Holy Spirit, manifested in the Spirit’s gifts apportioned to each as God decides for the building up of the Church. We will be people of forgiveness; a congregation of welcome, of acceptance; an assembly of hope-filled, faith-filled encouragers, restorers, and healers.

Church tradition tells us that unlike the other Apostles, Thomas travelled east, not west, eventually settling in India, preaching the Gospel, and establishing Churches. He probably died a martyr, although where and when are debated. We remember his faith, seek his saintly assistance, ask God to bless and empower us *that our faith may never be found wanting*, so that like him, we may be witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ ‘our Lord and our God’ for his glory and for the salvation of souls.

Blessed Thomas, Apostle and Martyr, faith-filled follower of Jesus, pray for us. Amen.