

Second Sunday of Easter (C)
April 15, 2007
By Father Charles Bowes

Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24
Revelation 1:9-11, 12-13, 17-19
John 20:19-31

God draws near in our deepest doubts.

Today we meet Thomas, Saint Thomas the Apostle.

He doubted that Jesus was alive. He was honest. Jesus did not reject him. He brought him to deeper faith. It is too bad that history has dubbed this apostle as "doubting Thomas."

Doubting Thomas has become a byword for unbelief. I've tried to imagine what Saint Thomas would say if he could speak to us today about his experience. So let's let him speak for himself.

"I could more accurately be called Realistic Thomas. All I did was what anyone else would do - what you would do: I asked for proof. My friends told me that the man we saw crucified had come back to life. Was I unreasonable to want some kind of evidence? Later Christians would use me to make up for their own lack of faith. They thought that their faith was better than mine because they believed without seeing. Nonsense! They would have nothing to believe if I hadn't seen. Someone had to have physical proof that Jesus was still alive. If not me, then someone else. I was born to do that, just as Judas was born to betray Jesus. Without Judas, there is no crucifixion. Without me, there is no proof of resurrection. I am not ashamed; I am proud of my actions. Because the blood of Jesus is now drying on my fingers - what he was, what he still is, lingers."

In my 36 years as a priest, I have met people with great faith. And, at times, many of them have had doubts: doubts in the existence of God, doubts about the teachings of the church, doubts in themselves and doubts about what lies ahead after death. I know I've had my doubts through the years. As I grow older, and so often in the presence of folks facing life-defining issues, I find I draw faith from their faith.

Yet, most of us, in one way or another, are a little like Thomas, aren't we? On those days when the strongest prescription no longer dulls the pain; during those nights when the phone remains silent, and the fate of a lost child gnaws a hole in your heart; on those mornings when despair sits beside you like an old friend, blocking out the sun and stealing all the warmth...which one of us doesn't want to put our hands on the wounds of the Christ or gaze upon his scars, if only to remind ourselves that wherever it is we're headed, he has been there, too.

For most of us, life holds dark moments of loss or pain, times when we struggle to balance fear and faith, doubt and discipleship. Does she love me? Will he recover? Can I ever forgive them? Does God even care?

And we are often too anxious, too alone, too startled to give voice to our deepest doubts. Afraid, somehow, that God won't love us anymore if we speak these fears aloud. But doubt is not the same as disbelief.

Struggling with faith is never the same as denying faith. And Thomas...blunt, straightforward, honest, wonderful Thomas...is the disciple who dared to bring doubt into dialogue with faith. Thomas is the disciple who was brave enough to say what we so often feel - "Show yourself, God! Let me see you!"

This portion of the Gospel of John was written for people who had a nagging suspicion that those who had not known Jesus during his earthly life were somehow at a disadvantage when compared to those who had known him. Jesus indicates that there is still a special blessedness for those who come to full faith without having seen. The Gospel also wants us to know that it is not necessary to have seen the risen Lord in order to have full faith in his resurrection.

Thanks to Thomas, doubting Thomas, Realistic Thomas, we know that to be true. So that when we hear, "The Word of the Lord, The Gospel of the Lord," we can say, "Thanks be to God, Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ." And when we hear said to us, "The Body of Christ, The Blood of Christ," we can say, "Amen."

Let us pray: May your Word ever rattle my comfortable small assumptions, Mighty One. Stretch my mind and my heart; make me a friend to all who are friends to you in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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deepest doubts.