

Second Sunday of Easter C - "Blessed are those who have not seen but believe."

April 27, 2025

During the Lent to Pentecost cycle, the Church presents the community with instructions to be given to those coming into the faith. The reason for this is not just to instruct the catechumens, as they were during Lent, or the neophytes, as they are properly called during the Easter season, but to encourage all of the people to return to the fundamentals of being a Christian. Therefore, the catechumens are presented with basics such as the Creed and Our Father and our scrutinized regarding their desire to leave a world that has rejected the Lord. This message was a reminder for all of us. During Easter time, the newly baptized are encouraged to stand up for the faith, to withstand attacks to the faith, to incorporate their faith in every aspect of their lives. This period is called the mystagogia.

This Sunday's gospel reading tackles a problem that affects all of us: the problem of doubting our faith. The gospel reading reminds us that faith is trusting in God, not finding physical proofs. If you notice, those in the gospel who are gifted with the appearance of the Resurrected Savior are those who already have faith in Jesus. Perhaps the best symbol of the Resurrection is the **empty tomb** which is not a proof of faith but a call to faith. It is a sign that reality has been transformed. Paradoxically it is the nothingness in the tomb that demands the disciples' faith in the fullness of what Jesus has foretold. This is the ideal for which we strive. We are human. We are not just spiritual, we are physical. Most of our knowledge comes from the physical side of our nature. We see, hear, touch, etc then we evaluate. Faith does not provide this. Faith demands that we subordinate our physical, scientific capabilities to our spiritual side. Our belief in the Word of God that Jesus has transformed reality takes primacy over whether we can see, feel, heal or touch any sort of change in reality. As said in the letter to the Hebrews (11:1) "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen". It is easy to understand why there is a lot of doubting Thomas in each of us. We are called to believe in the Resurrection of someone we have never seen. We are called to believe that he lives in the Church and in each of us. We are called to let our faith gift us with a new knowledge not available to our senses. How can we do this? Jesus said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' God himself is within us. He gives us the strength to trust him, to have faith. He gives us the strength to transform challenges to our faith, doubts, into ways of growing in faith. As long as we are alive we will have doubts in faith. These doubts might be regarding the dogmas of the faith, morality, the Church, or even the very existence of God and his goodness. Doubts in faith begins for most people in their pre-teen and teen years. Children can only think concretely. Adults can think about a thought. Children can only think about something they can visualize. Children need stories to point to truths. Adults need explanations. When a person begins thinking like an adult, he or she needs to view faith from an adult perspective, not a childish perspective. That's why it is perfectly normal for pre-teens and teens to question the faith. They are not questioning God or questioning the faith, they are seeking God. And that is good.

Sometimes doubts in faith comes when tragedy strikes, as it does strike all of us. Very often, uncertainties darken our minds and cloud our faith, especially when dreams are crushed by an unexpected death, a broken relationship or some such heavy cross. It is human and natural for us to be tempted to challenge God, to demand that He explain why such a terrible thing has happened. We don't understand life and we want to understand. In times like this we have to shore up our faith by praying like the man did in the Gospel of Luke, "Lord, I do believe, help my unbelief." Or, like Thomas did in our Gospel for today, "You are my Lord and my God." Sometimes we ask, "Will God forgive me for doubting Him?" This is **Divine Mercy Sunday**. The compassion and love of our Savior is so great that He sees our hurt, not the results of our pain. He gave us the Holy Spirit. St. Paul wrote that without the Holy Spirit we could not even call on the name of the Lord. In times of doubts, we have to remember that it is the Holy Spirit within us who gives us the strength to believe, to have the closed doors of our minds opened to see Christ, to touch his wounds and to be touched by him in return. So, to the recently baptized, and to all the baptized, to all who are tempted to doubt because it is part of the human condition to doubt, the Church reminds us today, "**Blessed are those who have not seen but believe.**"

Doubting Thomas is one of my favourite stories in the Bible. The Bible says, "Thomas . . . was not with them when Jesus came. The other followers kept telling Thomas, 'We saw the Lord.' But Thomas said, 'I will not believe it until I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his

side.' "A week later the followers were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came in and stood right in the middle of them. He said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand here in my side. Stop being an unbeliever and believe.' Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!'" (John 20:24-28) When life gets difficult, sometimes our struggles can leave us full of doubts. We might doubt God's goodness, his power, or even his love. In times like that, Jesus wants to help us believe. I love that story. I like Thomas because he's honest about his doubts. Many people have the wrong perception of doubt; they think doubt is always negative. But the truth is, doubt is good if it motivates us to investigate. When in doubt, check it out. Also, what I like about Thomas is that, even though he has doubts, he still hangs out with believers. If you've got doubts about God, the Bible, or Jesus, stay in the company of believers—that's right where you need to be. Most of all, what I love about Thomas is that, when he finally sees Jesus and realizes he's truly alive, he doesn't let pride get in the way. He immediately says, "*My Lord and my God!*" He makes his decision about God given the evidence he has. If we're having doubts about Jesus, we need to find people whose lives have been radically changed by a relationship with Jesus. We can't deny what someone has personally experienced. Second, doubt our doubts. For some reason, we get this backwards. We tend to believe our doubts and doubt our beliefs. Doubts are meant to be doubted, and beliefs are meant to be believed. Like Thomas, we are a strange mixture of belief and unbelief. We have faith in our hearts and doubts in our mind. We need to pray constantly "*I do believe; help my unbelief!*" (Mark 9:24) We can come to Jesus, begin a relationship with him, be certain we'll go to heaven, and grow in relationship with him—all without having our doubts cleared up first.

Do you think God frowns upon you for having doubts or welcomes your questions? Why do you think this way? Has there been a time in your life when God helped you believe, even with your doubts? How can you encourage people in your life to believe, even in the midst of doubts?

Are you ready to put your faith in Jesus? If you haven't trusted in Jesus and committed to following him, why wait any longer? You don't have to have answers to all of your doubts. You just need enough faith to ask God to help you believe. The Bible says, "*It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast*" (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV). If you're ready to commit your life to him, then pray this prayer:

"Dear Jesus, you have promised that if I believe in you, everything I've ever done wrong will be forgiven, I will learn the purpose of my life, and you will accept me into your eternal home in heaven one day. "I confess my sin, and I believe you are my Savior. You have promised that if I confess my sin and trust you, I will be saved. I trust you when you say salvation comes by grace, through faith, and not by anything I do. I receive you into my life as my Lord. Today I'm turning over every part of my life to your management. "I want to use the rest of my life to serve you instead of serving myself. I commit my life to you and ask you to save me and accept me into your family. In Jesus 'name I pray. Amen."