

Second Sunday of Easter–Divine Mercy Sunday: Doubts and Divine Mercy

We come to Church this Sunday full of the joy of Easter. And that is fitting. Today is the octave day of Easter, and like all octave days, a re-creation of the feast.

With all this understood, we come to Church this Sunday confronted with a subject on which we would rather not focus. That subject is doubts in the faith. The Sunday after Easter always presents the Gospel of Doubting Thomas. The reasoning is that the events in today's gospel take 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 that the Suffering Servant would be raised up. We have faith that He fulfilled his own prophecies that he would suffer, die and on the third day rise 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. In *1 Corinthians 15* St. Paul writes that one time Jesus appeared to over 500 disciples.

But still, within us all at various times we have doubts. And we feel terrible about them. How could we doubt God's existence, or His presence in our lives? Yet, doubts still occur in our lives. Why? Why do we have doubts? And will God see our doubts as sins?

Let me answer that second question first. This is Divine Mercy Sunday. God sees us and knows us as we are. He sees how hard we are trying to serve him. He also knows that negative thoughts often come into our minds. He knows that sometimes we have doubts. But His mercy is greater than our doubts. This is Divine Mercy Sunday. We all live under the Mercy of God.

But why, why do we have doubts? There are many factors behind our doubts. The first is that we are human beings. Doubting is part of the human condition. Everyone suffers times, often just fleeting moments, when he or she has doubts about the existence of God, the divinity and humanity of Jesus, the Eucharist or other teachings of the Church. Here is something you might find shocking: everyone means every one of us, includes priests, bishops, cardinals and, yes, even the Pope. Every pope has doubts because every pope is a human being. We will not be free from all doubts until we see God face to face in eternity. I love the story of the man with whose son was suffering from some form of what we would call epilepsy. You find this in the *Gospel of Mark 9:15-29*. Jesus came upon quite a scene, a lot of noise and yelling. People all gathered, seeming to be upset over something or other. So Jesus asked, "What's going on?" A man who was there said, "Sir, my son suffers from a spirit that seizes him, throws him down, causes him to foam from the mouth and roll around." Jesus asked, "How long has this been happening?" "Since childhood," the man responded. Then he added, "Sometimes he is thrown into the water or into a fire." Then the man said, "Sir if you can do anything, please help him." Jesus replied, "If I

can. Everything is possible for someone who has faith. Then the boy's father shouted out, "I do believe, Lord. Help those parts of me that don't believe." And with that the Lord healed the boy. "Help those parts of me that don't believe." That is also our prayer when we realize how much help we need to believe.

A second factor pushing us to doubt is the challenge of faith. There is a thought that somehow our minds can come to a knowledge beyond their capabilities. We find it hard to realize that our minds can be limited. We consider the mysteries of faith such as the Trinity, or the Divinity and Humanity of Christ, or why Christ died for us and we go to Google to help us understand these mysteries. But Google does not know the answers to the mysteries of faith. Alexa does not either. Nor does Siri. The answers to our questions can only be provided by God.

It takes a tremendous amount of humility to have faith. Having faith demands that we recognize that we do not have all the answers to the questions of life. If we are too proud to believe, then we limit ourselves to that which we can comprehend with our finite minds.

There is a wonderful story about the great Catholic intellectual, theologian and philosopher, St. Augustine. Augustine had one of the greatest minds of all of mankind. The story goes that Augustine was walking on a beach in North Africa trying to come to an understanding of the Trinity, one God in three persons but only one God. So Augustine was walking along when he came upon a little boy doing what children have been doing at the beach for ages. The child had dug a hole in the sand and had a little bucket. He would run down to the water and fill his bucket with water, then run back and dump the water into the hole. He kept doing this over and over. Meanwhile St. Augustine was considering the Trinity, "How can there be one God, but the Father is God, the Son is God and the Spirit is God." Finally, Augustine noticed the little boy, and said to him, "Hey, little boy. What do you think you are doing?" The little boy said, "I'm emptying all the water in the ocean into this hole." Augustine laughed and said, "You cannot do that." The child responded, "It is easier for me to empty all the water in the world into this hole than it is for you to fill your mind with an understanding of the mysteries of God." Rotten kid. He was probably an angel or something.

When people say to us, "How can you explain this?" the answer we should give is, "This is a mystery given to us by God which is beyond our mind's capability." To deny that there could be something out there, anything, greater than our understanding, is to deny ourselves the things the Lord wishes to reveal to us through faith.

Recently, I have come upon people who have said, "I am a person of science, not of faith." Their thought is that the two, science and faith, cannot exist together. They seem to forget that some of the greatest scientists in the world have been people of faith. Gregor Mendel, the founder of the modern science of genetics, was a Catholic priest. Madame Curie, Marie Curie, won two noble prizes in nuclear physics, and was a person of sincere faith. God created mankind with a brain, showed him creation and

then, basically, told man to use his brain to learn about Him and his wonders. Many believing scientist are in awe at the order of the universe. Intellectual brilliance has nothing to do with faith. Many extremely intelligent people are people of faith. Some brilliant people might be too proud to have faith.

A third factor that can lead to doubts is due to physical challenges in our lives or in the lives of our loved ones. A person becomes very sick. The doctor tells him or her that this might last for months, or years, or might be a condition that will last a lifetime. Or a loved one dies. Or a young person dies. It is quite normal for us to ask, "Where were you God when I, when we, were going through this?" And so we doubt God. God's answer to our cry is that He is with us holding us up, helping us get through and even grow stronger in our faith when it is challenged. Many times people will get through a crisis and then feel horrible that they doubted God, or even His existence. God sees the pain the person is suffering. He is the giver of Mercy. He is crying with us, just as Jesus cried at the tomb of Lazarus. He tells us to use our challenges to draw closer to Him. And we can, and we do. Perhaps that is why St. John Paul II placed Divine Mercy Sunday on the day when the Gospel is on Doubting Thomas.

A fourth factor leading to doubt entering into our lives is when someone is attacking us for our faith. Usually they are anti-Catholic bigots, although they would never consider themselves by that name. People whom we respect, such as a professor or teacher, might make a quip like "You are welcome to believe in the faith of your childhood," insinuating that our faith is nothing more than believing childish tales. People will routinely come up to us and say things like, "You Catholics don't read the Bible." or "You worship Mary" or some other absurdity we all know is false. After a while that can wear us down. Peer pressure takes over, and we start thinking that there is something wrong with us if we aren't seeing things like some others. That's when we really need to shore up our faith and say to others and even to ourselves, "I respect the beliefs of others and simply ask them to respect my belief."

There is a fifth factor that leads us to doubting the faith. That is this: doubts enter into our lives when we start departing from living a Christian life. Sometimes people in high school or in college or beyond get involved with drugs and choose substance abuse, or get involved with another person, start having sex, and then they think that maybe their faith is wrong. We cannot separate our faith from our actions. **If we stop behaving like Christians, we will soon stop believing like Christians.** Oh, we might say we still believe, but in reality we are just giving lip service to our faith. Many times people just say that they stopped believing, when actually what they stopped doing was living the Christian life.

Jesus looked at Thomas and said, "Do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas then said, "My Lord and My God." Then Jesus said something extremely important for us all to remember, he said, "You believe because you have seen. Blessed are those who have not seen and believe."

Jesus was talking about us. He was considering all of us gathered right here

and throughout the world, throughout history, and saying "Bless you, my friends for believing." Think of it, the Lord sees us in a greater light than his disciples. They saw and believed. We have not seen, but we do believe as St. Peter declares in today's second reading.

So when doubts come, whether due to others or circumstances, or due to things welling up inside us, we need to say, "Lord, I do believe. Help those parts of me that don't believe." We need to stop beating ourselves up over things that pass through our minds. We need to remember the Diving Mercy of the Lord. We need to trust that the Lord who promised to give us all good things, sees us striving to be our best amid all the attacks on our faith. We need to remember that God looked right at us when He said to Thomas, "You believe because you have seen. Blessed are those who have not seen but believe."