

## Second Sunday of Easter: Doubts and Faith

On this Second Sunday of Easter, we hear the Gospel of Doubting Thomas. That is because the event described takes place the Sunday after the Resurrection of the Lord. This Gospel leads me pondering two main questions: "Why do we have doubts?" and, "Why do we have faith?"

I know that doubting is part of being a human being, but I am still shocked when I read that not only did the disciples doubt the Lord during His ministry on earth and during His Passion, they even doubted Him after the Resurrection. And it was not just Thomas. Look at Matthew 28:16-20. As the disciples gathered on the Mount of the Ascension, Jesus appeared again to them, but, the scripture says, "some still doubted." Why did they doubt? Here they had the Resurrected Lord right in front of them. That was more than Thomas had when the other disciples told him that they had seen the Lord. Perhaps, some of the disciples on that mountain wondered if this really was a ghost, or a strange phenomenon. Most probably, their doubts were simply part of being human beings. We are always going to have doubts until we see God face to face.

What then are the causes of these doubts? I know that when we start growing intellectually, when our minds become capable of handling abstract concepts, we tend to question that which was presented to us the only way we could understand as a child, in concrete concepts. So here we are advancing from arithmetic to algebra to calculus in our knowledge of math, but stuck with an anthropomorphic image of God as an Man with a White Flowing Beard, ala Michelangelo's ceiling in the Sistine Chapel. The development of our knowledge of the depth of our beliefs barely approaches our intellectual development in the less significant areas of our lives.

I can remember the type of doubts I had a long time ago when I was a preppie. Yes, I went to a prep school, Seton Hall Prep. I even had a jacket I treasured with the school emblem on the front pocket and its motto, "Hazard Zet Forward." I'm still not sure what a zet was. At that time in my life I was more concerned with zits than zets. Anyway, I remember when I was a preppie wondering, "Does God really exist? Am I sure that this isn't all being made up? How could God be One in Three. How could Jesus be fully God and fully man?" Questions like that would really bother me until I finally said, "There are a lot of things I don't understand, and maybe I am not meant to understand them. But I don't have to understand to believe. I just have to believe." The existential philosopher, Soren Kirkegaard called this the leap of faith.

I remember back in college learning St. Thomas Aquinas' five rational proofs for the existence of God. There was the Unmoved Mover. Everything is put into motion by something else. A ball is put into motion by a baseball bat. A baseball bat by a hitter. A hitter by his body formed from his mother and father. And you go on and on until you have to say, somewhere there is something that puts other things into motion but is itself not put into motion. We call this Unmoved Mover, God. Or the argument that everything and everybody has been placed into existence by something or

someone else. There must be something or someone that is not caused to happen but exists in its own right. We call that someone God. And we can go on to talk about the existence that always was, the sum total of all possible goodness, and the intelligent being that directs all things to their natural ends. These five proofs were intellectually stimulating, but they didn't cure my desire for faith. They just provided me with arguments against atheists. God did not create us so we can argue with those He also created but who do not recognize Him. So, for me, and perhaps for you, to a great extent the intellectual arguments fall flat.

I know that many of us have to put up with people challenging our faith. Our high school and college students have to endure professors and others of the pseudo intelligentsia treating them like simple children because they believe. I say pseudo intelligentsia, because if they were truly intelligent, they would never question another's deep rooted faith. I know that many of us have to put up with relatives, friends, or even the door to door proselytizers who do their best to dissuade us from Catholicism or Christianity. Usually those who attack us help us deepen our convictions. Instead of arguing, just respond, "I am a Catholic. This is what I believe. I respect your belief. I don't ask you to believe what I believe. I only ask you to respect me for my faith."

A far more troublesome source of doubts come in all our lives when we enter into periods of crisis: Where was God when a child, Teen or young adult you knew and loved died? Or, where was God when you prayed for your Mom and Dad to stay together, and they still broke up? Perhaps, the problem here is that we ask for help, and take it for granted that if God doesn't intervene directly, He must not exist. Rather, I believe that God is present with us in crises. Sometimes our prayers are answered. But even when our crises result in death, failure or whatever, God is still present holding onto us. Remember that the shortest verse in scripture contains the Lord sharing our anguish. That shortest verse is found in the Gospel of John, John 11:35. It is only two words and takes place when Jesus stands outside of his friend Lazarus' tomb. The verse is simply, "Jesus wept." He wept over the condition of a world where the people who were created in the Image and Likeness of God would still suffer. A world that has rejected the Lord of Life has inflicted death and suffering on all its inhabitants.

But even crises are not the most serious cause of doubts in our lives. The most serious cause of doubts in our faith come when we leap into immorality. Many go through a period of hypocrisy, saying one thing in Church and doing something all together opposite outside of the Church. But eventually, the hypocrisy catches up with us all, and we have to make a choice between living a lie or rejecting our faith. If we are in high school or college, if we are a young single adult or an older married adult, or even if we are a senior citizen, if we go through life looking for the next party to get drunk at, or the best place to find drugs, or if we are on the prowl for the next guy or girl to have sex with, we are not going to be able to deal with our own presence in Church. We are not going to be able to deal with our own hypocrisy. So the choice will be to either change our life or reject our faith. Sadly, the second is often chosen. People in lives of sin deal with their hypocrisy by saying they no longer believe.

All of these and more are reasons why we have doubts. But why do we have faith?

We have faith not because we agree with rational arguments for faith, although these can help. We don't have faith because we are stubborn when confronted by those trying to dissuade us, although it is a very good and very right to proclaim our faith to those who challenge us. We should be stubborn in our faith before those who question us. Perhaps we have faith because faith is all that we can hold on to when we are in crisis. That is a very good reason for faith. Or perhaps we have faith because we know what we are like, how we would live our lives without faith. We hate the animal life we reduce ourselves to when we eliminate God from our lives. That is also a powerful reason for our faith.

All these are good reasons for faith, but the most important reason for faith is this: We have faith because we have experienced the Love of God in our lives as individuals and as a people. We have faith because we have felt His Love within us at various times in our lives, usually when we least expect it. We have faith when we reflect on how pointless life would be if Jesus had not Risen from the Dead and given us His Life, gifted us with the Spiritual.

At the end of today's Gospel we heard:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

We have faith because Jesus has given us life. The tomb is empty, but our lives are full. Jesus Christ is our deepest love. His presence makes all life worthwhile. His presence is a guarantee of eternal life. His presence is a guarantee of eternal love. "Lord, I need you," Matt Maher sings, and we join in.

This Sunday is Divine Mercy Sunday. The Lord knows us better than we know ourselves. He sees what is going on inside of us and calls us to trust in Him. We live under the mercy of God.