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Second Sunday of Easter  
Year B

Acts 4:32-35  
Psalm 133  
1 John 1:1-2:2  
John 20:19-31

*Thank You Thomas*

*“Jesus said, ‘Do not doubt but believe.’  
Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’”  
- John 20:27-28*

We don't know why Thomas wasn't with the other ten disciples locked behind closed doors hiding from the Jews that night. It was the night of the very day on which Jesus had risen from the grave, but their lives were still very much in a state of shock, disarray, and fear. Rumors and speculation had always followed Jesus where ever he had gone, only now, word was starting to circulate that Jesus' body was no longer in his tomb - it was gone! The disciples knew that *they* didn't steal his body. What was the use? Jesus was dead. So who else would do such a thing!

But then, like we talked about last week, Mary Magdalene arrived out of breath having run all the way from Jesus' tomb into the city and she told them that Jesus' body wasn't stolen, he had come back to life - she'd seen him! Evidently though, the fear of losing their own lives was still very real to the disciples because even with Mary telling them what she saw - Jesus himself! - we still find the disciples in today's gospel lesson behind locked doors in fear that their lives would end in the same way as their beloved rabbi.

Fear is often the fuel for doubt.

But Jesus does finally appear to the disciples themselves - mysteriously walking into the room without even having to open the door. Needless to say, the disciples were immediately overwhelmed with all the emotions of seeing a loved one that they saw executed with their very own eyes. And now Jesus was back and all the disciples' worries could be put to ease. All of them saw him, that is, except Thomas.

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Come on Thomas! Where were you! If you had only been there and seen Jesus you would have been able to avoid the eternal and unfortunate moniker "doubting" that would plague you for all of eternity. I can't help but imagine that there had to have been some of the other disciples who, before they saw Jesus with their own eyes, also doubted that he was alive. After all, they were still hiding for their lives even after Mary had told them that he was back. They weren't keeping watch for him. They weren't out spreading the word that Jesus had risen! I find it hard to fathom that they fully believed what Mary was saying. But Thomas was the one that was destined to take the fall for them all. It's a little like a classroom of students desperately trying to not make eye contact with the teacher that has just asked the class a particularly difficult question and none of them want to be chosen to try and answer it. In some respects, Thomas was the 'student' chosen that day to answer the tough question.

"I won't believe it 'til I see it!"

In all fairness, Thomas isn't the only one who has ever said that.

The challenge, however, that Jesus gave to Thomas is the same one that he gives to us today.

Believing does not require seeing. This wasn't the first time that Jesus had expressed his frustration with our human desire to see something before we agree to believe it. Earlier in chapter 4 of John's gospel Jesus says, "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, ... you will never believe." (John 4:48) This was not a simple observation from Jesus. It was meant as a chastisement for the people's demand for a miracle as if he was some sort of circus side-show act.

Faith vs. Doubt ... the constant conundrum.

So let's talk a little about faith.

First, **faith is actually a grace from God.** Faith is a gift provided to us from God, "a supernatural virtue [that is] infused [in us] by him." (CCC 153) "Before [our] faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to [help us] move." We are actually assisted by God to have faith. We "must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves [our] hearts and converts [our hearts] to God, who [then] opens the eyes of [our] minds and 'makes it easy for [us] to accept and believe the truth.'" (CCC 153, *Dei Verbum* 5) To attribute faith to being an act of my will would suggest that I can earn God's favor and salvation through my own strength, which of course, we cannot. I can't muster true faith without God first giving it to me as a gift. St. Paul tells us, "For by [God's] grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

But **there is a human component to faith** isn't there? God doesn't merely make us faithful robots. He has blessed us with an intellect, a mind, that can think and choose. He has given us the free will to choose the gift that he has given to us - to choose to have faith. Therefore, it is our minds and our wills that respond to this gift from God and thereby co-operate with the Holy Spirit. This is a beautiful union!

Many of us have heard the phrase "blind faith." But **faith isn't blind.** Faith gives us clarity of vision it doesn't conceal. God doesn't conceal and deceive us. Satan is the deceiver. Satan is the one who propagates doubt to lure us away from God. God has given us countless external recorded proofs that should encourage us to believe, and those then work in conjunction with the internal assistance of the Holy Spirit to confirm our faith and provide understanding. Faithful eyes 'see' truly and understand because they have embraced the testimony of the saints. We have also received the accurate record of Jesus' miracles, we can read the writings of the saints through the ages, we can see fulfilled prophecies, and we can witness the universal church's growth and continued presence even in the face of prolonged persecution. Faith is credible and brings clarity and is not a "blind impulse of the mind." (CCC 156)

We must also never forget that **faith is necessary for salvation.** The writer to the Hebrews tells us that "without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that [God] exists and that he rewards those who seek him." (Hebrews 11:6) Therefore we must persevere and press on because it is possible, as St. Paul tells us, to make a "shipwreck of [our] faith" should we reject a heavenly conscience. (1 Timothy 1:18-19).

We need to feed and nurture our faith through the study of God's holy Word, and we need to fervently pray for the Lord to "increase our faith." (Luke 17:5) For faith gives us an advance taste of eternal life when we will see God "face to face." (1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 John 3:2) To live a life of faith now will reveal that which is promised to come in the next life.

But our faith can, and will be, put to the test by the evils of this world: suffering, injustice, death, and our sin. Our faith can also be challenged by the temptations of this world to follow *its* ways as opposed to the ways of God. Our faith can be shaken and tempted to stray. And when that happens we must surround ourselves with the other witnesses to the faith. It is then we must turn to the witnesses like Abraham, who "Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become 'the father of many nations,'" ; we must look to the Virgin Mary, who, in "her pilgrimage of faith", walked into the "night of faith"<sup>1</sup> in sharing the darkness of her son's suffering and death; we must look to pastors, priests, and Sunday school teachers who have instructed and ministered with us through your darkest days; we must look to faithful friends and family who have shepherded us along this way.

Again the writer to the Hebrews tells us, "since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Where did Hebrews tell us to look? To Jesus. Exactly whom Thomas was looking at himself that night after the resurrection.

And what was Thomas' response to seeing the risen Lord? Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)

Doubt is self-centered and places my trust in my own understanding of things. (Proverbs 3:5) **Faith, however, acknowledges God in all things and is Christ-centered.**

May we all be willing to hear the testimony of Thomas this day and move from doubting the truths of God to proclaiming our faith in them. Because, to voluntarily choose doubt over faith won't lead to some form of heightened understanding of this world, but rather it will lead to spiritual blindness. Instead we must nourish and protect our faith and reject everything that would be opposed to the grace and revelation of God through Jesus Christ.

True faith is a gift from God that works in conjunction with our minds and actively chooses God because God is trustworthy and believable. Faith is necessary for salvation and therefore should be nurtured and grown through the study of Scripture and through fervent prayer. Our faith will be put to the test and we should cling to the church and to other faithful Christians to safeguard our faith, and in all things true faith will exclusively acknowledge God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - as Lord of all.

And with renewed faith let us join with Thomas in saying, "My Lord, and my God!"  
Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *Lumen gentium* 58; John Paul II, *Redemptoris mater*, 18