

Homily for the Second Sunday of Easter

The Journey through Doubts to Faith.

The Gospel reading for today takes all of our Easter idealism, our delight in the Risen Savior, and applies a sobering dose of reality. The reading as well as recent events in our parish, country and world, lead me to write about faith, doubts and crises.

It is very, very easy to be a person of faith when all goes well. When life is without any really deep crises, when the hardest things to accept are the deaths of elderly parents and hospitalization for minor ailments like appendicitis, it is easy for each of us to be a person of faith. But when a crisis tears at our hearts, as when a young spouse dies or, worse still, a child dies, or a marriage is evidently on the rocks, then very often we feel our faith ebbing. Many times we enter into a period of anger at God and a time of doubts. This does not mean that we have lost our faith. It simply means that we are being called to a deeper faith.

It was easy for the disciples to believe in the Lord when they felt the magnetism of His words, when they witnessed His healings, when they saw His miracles. But it was much harder for them to believe after He had been taken away to be killed. It was harder for them to believe when they realized that they also could be killed for having been His followers. Thomas doubted the Resurrection because he had suffered the crisis of the crucifixion. His faith in God waned. Like the other specially chosen disciples who would later be called apostles, like Peter, James, Andrew, Bartholomew, Simon and all the rest, Thomas ran and hid. He was not to be found on Golgotha. He was too afraid to remember the promises of the Lord. But his faith was restored when he saw the Lord. At this point Jesus told Thomas about a greater faith, a faith that He has called you and me to. The Lord looked at Thomas and then looked down the ages at us and said, "Blessed are those who have not seen yet believe."

When a crisis hits us we all pray for deliverance. "God, please keep my husband, my child alive. God, please save our marriage. God, protect my son at war." If deliverance comes we feel that we have seen the Lord. This is all well and good, but how much greater is our faith when we hold onto the Lord even when our prayers are not answered. "Blessed are those who have not seen yet believe."

Last Sunday we were called to believe in the Resurrection. Our own faith in the Resurrection is not based on experiencing a presence of the Risen Lord, but on an empty tomb. When we feel empty, when we feel that the Lord is no longer in our lives, we have to recognize that more than ever He is alive, among us.

We should not feel bad about having crises in faith. We should feel very human. We should also realize that our crisis can lead us to an even stronger faith. That which challenges us often strengthens us. Let me give you an example of this from everyday life. A fourteen year old child does something very wrong, something that could have resulted in harm for himself or herself or others--like go for a joy ride in a car and then get into an accident. Once caught, the teenager has to deal with the law and whatever reparations need to be made. The teenager also has to go before his or her parents. The parents will most likely have their own punishment connected to the incident, such as, "Regardless of what the law says, you will not get your driver's license until you are seventeen," but good parents will still say to their teenager, "I love you despite your irresponsible behavior." When they do this they

demonstrate a fuller, deeper love of their child than before their love was tested by what the child did.

On a higher plane, for us to say to the Lord, "I love you and believe in you despite the times that I have been uncertain of you in my life," demonstrates a deeper faith than we had before our faith was challenged.

A young wife dies. A young man is devastated. He argues with God, even gets angry with God. "How could you let this happen to her," he says in his grief forgetting that God does not do bad things or cause bad things, but cries with us in our crises just as he cried with Martha and Mary when Lazarus died. In time, after the initial shock and upset, the young man recognizes that God is present in bad times as well as in good times and then chooses to believe. His faith is now based not just on his experience of the good, but also on his choice of God during crisis. The crisis, while not caused by God, led him to a deeper faith than he had previously.

Let's not persecute ourselves. Doubting is part of being human. A person who does not react with anger at the time of a tragedy might be a saint, but most likely is a person who really never had a high quality of love. The person who recognizes that God was certainly there even at the time of anger, is a person whose faith has grown.

We pray today that we might all have a mature faith, able to grow through crises. We pray today that we might all be included in that phrase of the Lord's, "Blessed are those who have not seen but believe."

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