

Second Sunday of Easter
Acts 5:12-16; Rev 1:9-1a, 12-13, 17-19; Jn 20:19-31
April 24, 2022

It is easy to make the mistake that believing was easier for those who saw Jesus than it is for us. The Gospels show that there were many people who saw Jesus and still didn't come to have faith (to believe) in him. Seeing is not necessarily believing, since the act of faith involves a decision to believe.

Today's Gospel shows that even the apostles had their problems believing. Thomas wasn't the only apostle to doubt the resurrection, all of them did. At daily Mass this past week, we heard the Gospel story of Mary Magdalene not finding Jesus in the tomb, and not recognizing him when he appeared to her in the garden, until he called her by name. She brought the news of the Risen Jesus to the apostles and wasn't believed. On Wednesday, we heard the Gospel of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, who didn't recognize Jesus as he walked along with them. It wasn't until the meal they shared that evening that *they recognized him in the breaking of the bread.* They quickly returned to the apostles in Jerusalem, who didn't believe their story. St. Mark tells us that when Jesus appeared to the apostles on Easter evening, *he chastised (upbraided, (scolded, reprimanded) them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.*"

We can sympathize with the apostles. The crucifixion of Jesus dealt them an overwhelming blow. They had invested an enormous amount of their lives in Jesus. They had given up their jobs, and left everything to follow him. And suddenly he was gone. The more the truth (reality) of his death came home to them, the greater their loss appeared. The value and meaning of everything in their lives was threatened; their friendship, their faith, their whole lives.

Then the incredible happened – Jesus was once more in their midst. The first thing he did was to wish them peace and showed them his wounds.

Why? Because those wounds helped to identify him as the one who was crucified. And these wounds were the proof of his love for them, for love is proved by deeds. Then he invited them to *“see and to touch.”*

The example of Thomas is particularly (helpful) instructive for us. Thomas shows a refreshing honesty. He made no attempt to hide his doubts. Today we often look on doubt as a sign of weakness and tend to feel guilty about having doubts.

Yet doubt can be a point of growth, a stepping-stone to a deeper understanding.

It certainly brought a deeper understanding for Thomas: he gave expression to the highest statement of faith in Jesus in the entire Gospel of John: *“My Lord and my God.”*

On earth, there is no such thing as absolute certainty about spiritual things. If there were, faith wouldn't be necessary. Absolute certainty can lead to arrogance, intolerance, and stupidity. The Trappist monk and writer Thomas Merton wrote: *“The man of faith who has never experienced doubt is not a man of faith.”*

Every community needs a person such as Thomas; someone who has the courage to ask the questions no one else dares ask. These people are truthful, and they help to keep others truthful also. Often they upset believers by demonstrating the fragility of the believer's faith; they upset skeptics by making them feel the (**anguish**, distress) of the emptiness in their lives.

Having overcome his crisis of faith, Thomas went on to be a courageous witness to Jesus and became one of the greatest missionaries of the early Church. According to tradition, Thomas brought the Gospel to Persia, Syria, and India, where he was martyred; the first of the apostles to die for Jesus.

Jesus invites each of us to draw close to him in faith and to look at his wounds. Even though we can't touch him physically, we can draw close to him spiritually.

Our task, yours, and mine, is to make Jesus “visible” in the world, just as the first disciples did. Once they had seen Jesus, they felt compelled to make him known to others.

The world today is full of doubters and non-believers. The only way they will be converted to belief is if they can **“see”** Jesus and **“touch”** Jesus in his followers. But if Jesus' followers have no wounds of love to show them, the non-believers are not likely to be convinced.

Through our words and example, may we deserve to be numbered among those whom Jesus declared blessed: *“those who have NOT seen and yet have believed.”*

-- Fr. Stephen Lattner, O.S.B.