

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER
Acts 4:32-35; Ps 118; 1Jn 5:1-6; Jn 20:19-31
April 11, 2021
Fr. David Pignato

On this Second Sunday of Easter, we hear in the Gospel how Jesus appeared to the disciples on that first Easter Sunday, and then how He appeared to them again a week later, on the second Sunday after His Resurrection. For some reason, the Apostle St. Thomas was not present with the other disciples on Easter Sunday, and he refused to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. *“Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side,”* he said, *“I will not believe.”*

A week later, though, Thomas *was* there, when Jesus suddenly appeared again, and said to Thomas, *“Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.”*

Pope St. Gregory the Great, in the 6th century, commented on this account from the Gospel and said, “Dearly beloved, what do you see in these events? Do you really believe that it was by chance that this chosen disciple was absent, then came and heard, heard and doubted, doubted and touched, touched and believed? It was not by chance but in God’s providence. In a marvellous way God’s mercy arranged that the disbelieving disciple, in touching the wounds of his master’s body, should heal our wounds of disbelief. The disbelief of Thomas has done more for our faith than the faith of the other disciples. As he touches Christ and is won over to belief, every doubt is cast aside and our faith is strengthened. So the disciple who doubted, then felt Christ’s wounds, becomes a witness to the reality of the resurrection” (Office of Readings, July 3).

St. Gregory the Great explained that it was no accident that Thomas was absent on Easter Sunday. No, God arranged for Thomas to be absent at first and to doubt, so that he could then be convinced of the Resurrection by the undeniable proof of touching the wounds of the Risen Christ. And because St. Thomas demanded and was given proof of the Resurrection, we who live centuries later can justify our faith in Christ – because it is based on solid proof that was given to the world.

This Second Sunday of Easter each year is a good time to remind ourselves that our faith in Christ is based on reason and fact and proof. Our faith is not some superstition, or some willful decision to believe ungrounded in fact or reason. Simply put, we would *not* believe in Christ if He had not risen from the dead and

given the world proof of His Resurrection. Jesus knew that He could not expect us or the world to believe in Him if He did not give proof of His Resurrection. St. Luke's account of Christ's appearance on Easter makes clear that Christ gave the other disciples the same proof He gave later to St. Thomas. When Jesus appeared to the disciples, He said, "*Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have.*" "*And as he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ... [He also] asked them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of baked fish; [and] he took it and ate it in front of them*" (Lk 24: 39-43).

It's true that we have *not* seen the Risen Christ, as the Apostles did. But neither have we seen George Washington or Pontius Pilate, and yet we believe what history has recorded about them, based on the testimony of the witnesses who *did* see them. In the same way, we believe in Christ because of the testimony of those who saw Him risen from the dead. And if they did not see Him and testify to Him, we would *not* believe in Him. As St. Paul said, "*[I]f Christ has not been raised, then empty [too] is our preaching; empty, too, [is] your faith*" (1Cor 15:14); "*[I]f Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins*" (1Cor 15:17). If Christ was not raised from the dead, and yet we still believe in the eternal life He promised, then, St. Paul said, "*we are the most pitiable people of all*" (1Cor 15:19).

So, our Catholic faith in Christ is based on reason – we do not believe without good reasons to do so. And, we should be able to give these reasons to anyone who asks for them. "Always be ready," Scripture says, "to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope" (1Pet 3:15). This means we should be able to explain why we believe in Christ and in the eternal life He promises to those who are faithful to Him. A blind faith will not convert the world, especially in our own age of skepticism and suspicion.

Jesus knew that for our faith to be persuasive it had to be based on reason and fact, and so He gave the world proof of His Resurrection and His divinity. Those of us who believe in Christ without seeing Him should be grateful to St. Thomas for demanding proof of the Resurrection. Because He was given such proof, we now know that our faith is based on something that really happened in history and in the world. And, because of that, we know it is not foolish or unreasonable to believe in Christ and hope for eternal life. When Thomas saw the Risen Christ, he said, "*My Lord and my God!*" And Jesus said to him, "*Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.*"