

Second Sunday of Easter

April 11, 2021

Year B RCL

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

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

By: The Rev. Fr. Fabian Villalobos

Last week we celebrated Easter Sunday, our hearts and minds were full of joy by the acknowledgement that our God is more powerful than death itself. We celebrated his victory and declared with all the believers that the tomb was empty, that Jesus the Son of God was alive then and is alive today by the power of God.

On this second Sunday of Easter, we normally focus on Thomas the doubter, the disciple that needs proof to believe. However, before we talk about Thomas, I would like to call your attention to what happened in the first part of the gospel narrative. In today's Gospel, Jesus as the Risen Lord greets the disciples saying, "Peace be with you" two times and later he adds, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." From this first part of the gospel, it is possible to

conclude that the first fruits of the resurrection are the Peace of God and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Remember that The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, and as classically defined in theology, is “the love the love between the Father and the Son.” This constant movement of giving–receiving-and giving back of love produces the Holy Spirit. “It is through the Holy Spirit that God is at work in the world and in the church even now.” BCP 852

Please observe that in the outline of our faith commonly call the Catechism, in the back of our Book of Common Prayer, “We recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit when we confess Jesus Christ as Lord and are brought into love and harmony with God, with ourselves, with our neighbors, and with all creation.” BCP page 852

It is through the gift of the Holy Spirit that we enter and maintain our communion with God. The mission we accomplish as Christians and believers “send/sent” by Jesus is made possible through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The challenge for us believers this week is to recognize that even if the Holy Spirit is with us always working, our human spirit is also present inside of us

and could dominate and obscure the presence of God. The human ego (self) if not controlled could develop a personal version of a god that has no room for a different divinity outside oneself.

One example of this deviation of the ego is present in the second part of the Gospel in the unbelief of Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples.

When the other disciples told Thomas, "We have seen the Lord", he answers, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Believing means for Thomas seeing, touching, and holding. He is too much immersed in his human spirit and after the lack of explanation of what happened in Jesus' resurrection, Thomas' decision is this: I need physical proof. I need to verify that what I see is real. I need to touch and put my fingers inside the place of the nails.

Doubt is not exclusive of the gospel; "Thomases" are always around us. Not far long ago, we read and watched in the news testimonies of people who denied the existence of the COVID virus. We heard testimonies especially of those who made the news because they passed from denying the virus to contracting the virus or knowing someone close to them who contracted or even died from the virus. These "Thomases" later urged people to take the COVID virus seriously.

Thomas was not present when Jesus appears to the disciples, but they saw him and they told Thomas. Just to hear this news from them should have been sufficient, but it was not for Thomas. This is why he is called the “twin.” He is the other part of each one of us. He is the rational part that distrusts and neglects what cannot be explained. Thomas is afraid of receiving and believing the news from the others. The message and testimony of the other 10 disciples is not enough for Thomas. He is clearly in disbelief, “Unless I see... and touch.... I will not believe.” Thomas’ faith is conditional and has requests to God. Each time that we try to control our relationship with God like Thomas, asking proof from God, we replicate his foolishness, we expect God to do or to act according to what we want or need. We forget that God *IS* God.

A week later Thomas and the disciples were together in the house when “Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Again, we hear of the Peace as the fruit of Jesus’ resurrection.

It is then that Jesus said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.”

“Do no doubt but believe” is not only for Thomas, but for you and me here and now. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

This is the center of our being here today. We need to understand that Jesus our Risen Lord is with us when we are in community; when we believe the testimony of the other ten; when we hear Jesus Scripture; when we break bread together; when we declare that Jesus is Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit; when we experience his Peace and share it with others.

Even Thomas at the end of the encounter with the Risen Lord has the gift of declaring Jesus as His Lord and His God.

We like Thomas have the opportunity to believe. The conclusion of today's Gospel is that this was written "so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name".

We are Thomas's twins, we can doubt, we can express our desire to see in order that we believe, we can make requests to God, however, we need to remember that no matter what we believe or do not believe, God is alive! God is more powerful than what we can explain or imagine. God is superior to our understanding. God is eternal; God was before us and will be after us.

God's mercy is greater than our doubts. The promise of being blessed is for us when we hear: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

So let us believe in God even if we do not fully understand, let us trust in Him,
let us enjoy His peace and His life among us. Amen.