

April 10th 2021 – Easter II

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

The Bloody Proof of Faith

I couldn't be a Thomas, could you?

Sounds very pious, but that is not what I mean. I couldn't be a Thomas, not because my faith is unshakable or anything close to that, but because I would faint when I had to touch the wounds. There wasn't much discussion in my teenage years whether I should become a medical doctor. If we forget about putting fingers into bloody wounds and stuff like that, Thomas is a very interesting case.

He has often been described as someone weak in faith because he doubted while all the disciples believed. Well, really well done, disciples, you walked around with the Son of God for years and witnessed all the healing, the hearts set on fire, the real presence and acting of God and then you also encountered the risen Christ face to face... Sure, you are much stronger in faith than poor Thomas who happened to be shopping or doing something else while you were sitting behind locked doors and encountering the risen Christ.

Let's just go back a week. The disciples were fire and flame, expecting the immediate arrival of the Kingdom of God until (what we call) Maundy Thursday when Jesus was arrested. At the crucifixion of Jesus the next day, the male disciples had all already left. So quickly had they given up. The women were witnessing the crucifixion, staying with Jesus to the end and then taking care of the burial and the rites around that.

The men dispersed. They went back to Galilee and to Emmaus and wherever they had come from.

They only came back to Jerusalem after individual encounters with the risen Christ and, then, they were all gathered behind locked doors, and Christ appeared to them again as a group.

Just Thomas wasn't there and that earned him the reputation of the one weak in faith.

The good thing about this is that many people have resonated and still resonate with Thomas. Maybe you, too. After all, he doubts but then is so touched by the encounter with Christ that he makes one of the strongest confessions in all the Gospels, one that would later be reserved for a Roman emperor: "My Lord and my God" (*Dominus meus et Deus meus*).

So, message number 1: having doubts does not make us bad believers. Doubts can lead to growth and, eventually, put our faith on a stronger base even.

There is another message. In the tradition, Thomas was often looked down upon. However, that did not change the fact that Christ did what Thomas needed in order to believe. Thomas needed to touch the wounds. Don't ask me what I think about that, but he needed to feel, he needed the touch, the physical experience to believe. And the wonderful message here is, Christ met Thomas, where Thomas needed to be picked up. Christ did not say, as I would have, you are crazy, Thomas and of little faith. Christ came to Thomas and let him touch the wounds. While none of the other disciples were granted that, the doubting Thomas was granted this close encounter.

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And then, a strong faith needs the Thomas in us. We might not have seen Christ face to face and touched the wounds (I hope), but a strong faith yearns for an encounter with Christ, just to find him in our hearts and to find him in the face of our neighbors and at work in our actions in the world.

There they were, behind closed doors. Probably they were sharing their experiences of the risen Christ and wondering whether they had been fooled by their grief or their imagination, when Christ stepped into their midst.

And immediately they felt that overwhelming presence of God in their midst which they had known in the presence of Jesus of Nazareth before his death.

Christ was not kept out by locked doors. Christ was not kept out by doubts.

Christ blessed them with the Holy Spirit, a remaining presence of God in their midst, in their hearts and in their work.

God meets you where you are. God meets you where you need to be picked up.

However, it has been the experience of many a saint that years of silence can be part of a life in faith. Mother Teresa wrote about years of silence. No sign of God, no touch, nothing. But the memories of the real encounters with the risen Christ, the memories of God at work in her work among the poor, the memories of that living fire in her heart kept her going; not without doubts but it helped her through the silence.

I wonder whether Thomas ever needed a refresher encounter. Another touching of the wounds. If he did, he was not alone and if you feel to be sitting behind locked doors these days, doubting your encounters with the risen Christ in the past, you are not alone.

Be brave to unlock the door.

Be a Thomas and question faith again and again. A faith that doubts is open to be surprised by God. God will meet you where you are and where you need God. Even if the silence is long and weighing heavy, there will be the moment when Christ stands next to you saying, Peace be with you.

I couldn't be a Thomas but I am very grateful for Thomas and his doubts. For him, Christ unlocked the door and Thomas proclaimed to the world, Christ is risen. Alleluia!