

2nd SUNDAY EASTER

John 20:19-31

THOMAS

Believe it or not, there are two Beatitudes in John's Gospel. (We usually think of Matthew or Luke having the two more well-known versions.) The first beatitude is ***the washing of the feet of his disciples*** and the second beatitude is ***believing without seeing***, today's gospel.

It is easy for some to identify with Thomas. He was the pessimist among the disciples. He regarded an invitation to go to Jerusalem with Jesus as ***an invitation to death***. When Jesus called himself the "Way", he said bluntly, "***How do we know the way?***" And in today's gospel we hear Thomas saying, "***My Lord and My God!***" his profession of faith.

One thing about Thomas is that he was honest. "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." For this honest statement, Thomas the Twin gets labeled for all eternity as ***the doubter***. But to be fair, in John's gospel, Simon Peter went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there and the cloth that had covered his head. Nothing was said whether he believed or not. But the other disciple, ***the Beloved, saw and believed***.

When we read of the apostles' reaction to the resurrection of Jesus that the women related to them in Luke's account, their doubt becomes more embarrassing, as we read, "The women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James; the others who accompanied them also told this to the apostles, but their story ***seemed like nonsense and they did not believe them***." Also in Luke's resurrection narrative, to give Peter credit, "...he got up and ran to the tomb, bent down, and saw the burial cloths alone; then he went home amazed at what had happened."

In **Mark's version**, he writes, Mary Magdalene went and told his companions, "When they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, ***they did not believe***." Later, Jesus appeared to them and ***rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart!*** Matthew cleans up Mark's embarrassing remarks of Jesus and

writes nothing, except that the angel appeared to the women and told them to tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee.

So, who really is the **doubter**? I believe that Thomas was like the rest of the disciples, very sad at Jesus' death, especially since they ran away and left Jesus to die by himself with only the faithful women the foot of his cross. This was really an embarrassing fact in the early church. Only John's Gospel mentions the Beloved Disciple at the foot of the cross.

In the end, we will never know how **we will react** if put in a similar situation as the apostles. We can only prepare ourselves through prayer and try to model Jesus in our lives in how we treat everyone else. I believe that Thomas was like the rest of the disciples and us, but that he loved Jesus so much that his reactions were typical of someone who just had their soul ripped out through grief from the death of a loved-one, especially since he said, like Peter, that he would die with him. In his own way, he was saying, leave me with my own grief. That I can believe, rather than be disappointed with a false report that he is risen from the dead. That would be worse.

It is easy to say, "My Lord and My God," when things are going well, and especially when we have seen the Lord. But in times of grief and darkness, we are asked to call upon the Lord we cannot see and open our hearts to that place in us which is always there but usually neglected, that **deep down space within our souls** that can only be accessed through a habit of sitting with our heart open to him day after day. There we will find that gentle breeze that the Prophet Elijah knew was the presence of the Lord. It will never be something we control but can only develop, a prayerful position, such that as leave the door unlocked and ajar as we wait for him to enter and sit with us in silence.

Then with Thomas, we can say, "My Lord and My God."