

Doubt, Courage, Risk

2nd Sunday of Easter (Year B)

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The Lutheran theologian Paul Tillich wrote, “living faith includes the doubt about itself, the courage to take this doubt into itself, and the risk of courage.” (*Dynamics of Faith*, 119) While this sentence is very confusing, it is also very profound. In this one sentence, Tillich weaves together doubt, courage, and risk in his definition of faith. While we are not used to associating these words with faith, I think his definition is very appropriate. Each of these words can turn our faith from something dull into something dynamic. I want to call brief attention to each of these words that comprise his definition of faith.

First, doubt: The theme of doubt usually comes up in connection to this weekend’s Gospel, which features ‘Doubting Thomas.’ As we heard, Thomas was not present when the Risen Lord first appeared to the apostles, so he said, “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.” Ever since this story, doubt has unfortunately come to be identified in the Christian tradition as a sin, as if it were a denial of God or a rejection of Jesus Christ. In reality, though, it is not necessarily a sin. Doubt can actually help us to clarify what we believe, probe deeper into the mysteries of our faith, and allow us to be more honest with God. Sometimes those with the most doubts turn out to be the ones who can say, like Thomas, ‘my Lord and my God.’

Second, courage: Too often, we have presented faith as something that exists in the past. For some, being a Christian has meant trying to

go back in time to live in a previous century as if that is where true faith resides. While people in the past certainly had faith, this retreat into the past is not very courageous. Courage calls us to find God in the present moment. It involves making the bold leap of faith from not seeing to believing. In today's Gospel, Jesus calls these people 'blessed.'

Third, risk: As a whole, Christianity has become a religion of playing it safe and maintaining the status quo. Because of our preoccupation with being right and having correct doctrine, we very likely have missed opportunities for growth, development, and even the ability to learn from our mistakes. A living faith is willing to take risks because it trusts that God will provide.

Doubt, courage, and risk are not the opposites of faith, but essential components of faith.

Are any of these themes absent from my understanding of faith?
Could any of them help restart my faith?

Each one of us has been given the precious gift of faith. While the desire to protect it is understandable, perhaps faith is stronger and more resilient than we think. As we continue with this mass, let us pray for a living faith, one that "includes the doubt about itself, the courage to take this doubt into itself, and the risk of courage." (119)