

Fear Not WEEK TWO Second Sunday of Easter April 11, 2021

Two weeks ago I received my second COVID shot.

I didn't have much reaction to the first dose,
just a sore arm for a couple days.

But I'd heard that some people had more serious reactions to their second shot.

And because my appointment was scheduled for Tuesday of Holy Week,
my biggest fear was that I might not be able to do all the things

I needed to do in Holy Week, which included Masses, confessions and a funeral.

My staff can tell you that I asked for lots of prayers before getting my second shot.

Thankfully, my only reaction again was a sore arm for a few days.

But I have to be honest, that fear of the unknown worried me a lot
in the days leading up to my appointment.

My experience in Holy Week is minor compared to
what so many people have gone through in the past year.

There have been so many unknowns about the future -
so many questions about the pandemic, our nation and life in general.

*Will I get Covid, will my family get sick, when will my kids return to school,
when will all of this end?*

When will our nation heal, racism end, the economy recover?

Living with the unknown can be really uncomfortable - painful even.

And that's because if you're like me, you want answers.

I want to know what to expect so I can make plans and get ready.

I want to be in control.

And over the past year we've all learned that there are
some things we have no control over.

SCREEN: Fear Not! main screen

Today we're continuing our Easter message series titled, Fear Not.

In the readings at Mass this month,

God is instructing us on what to do with our fears.

Last week on Easter I talked about just how powerful an emotion fear can be.

I said that fear can shut us down emotionally - paralyze us.

It can make us selfish and defensive.

Fear can lead to suspicion of others.

If unchecked, fear creates a never-ending downward spiral of doubt, worry and negative thoughts.

The end result of dealing with fear over a long period of time is that we can become angry, bitter and isolated.

When fear rules our lives, we are at our worst.

But it doesn't have to be like this - there is another way.

SCREEN: Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the assessment that something else is more important than fear. -FDR

This is one of my favorite quotes about fear.

It was spoken by Franklin Delano Roosevelt who was president during the Great Depression and World War II.

He said: *courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the assessment that something else is more important than fear.*

The followers of the Risen Christ had plenty to be afraid of, but they refused to let their fears control them.

They 'assessed' that sharing the Good News was way more important than their fears.

They teach us that when we turn to God and our faith to get control of our fears we can live happy, healthy lives as disciples.

The readings today gave us before and after snapshots of the lives of Jesus's followers.

In the Gospel story of Thomas, we saw the before snapshot.

And in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we see what life was like for followers after they met the Risen Christ.

Let's start with Thomas.

He was one of Jesus's Twelve Apostles, but history has given Thomas a very unflattering nickname: Doubting Thomas.

He's called this because he was out of the room

the first time the Risen Jesus appeared.

When the others told him that Jesus had been raised from the dead, here's what Thomas said:

SCREEN: 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, I will not believe.

This is the origin of his nickname, 'Doubting Thomas'.

He needed unmistakable proof.

But Thomas was no different from the other Apostles.

They didn't believe until they saw.

Despite the fact that today's Gospel told us Jesus first appeared to them on Easter, a week later, they were still hiding behind locked doors when Jesus appeared again to Thomas.

And when he appeared, he erased Thomas's doubts.

So much so that Thomas was able to profess, *'My Lord and my God.'*

I can relate to Thomas.

I think most of us can.

As I said, this past year has tested us in so many ways.

And while we've all grown in our resilience,

we've also had moments of uncertainty, hopelessness and fear.

We've all struggled with doubt and wanted proof that things will get better.

If that is how you're feeling right now, you might be asking:

How can I get to that point of faith and trust that Thomas found?

How can I surrender my doubts so I can believe and fear not?

Well, if Thomas prior to meeting the Risen Christ is the 'before snapshot', our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles is the 'after snapshot'.

We heard a description of life in the early church in the first few months after Easter:

SCREEN: There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles,

and they were distributed to each according to need.

The Church was of one heart and mind.

Everything was held in common.

And here's the term that described them:

a community of believers.

A community of believers.

Why did they choose to live like this?

Well, as beautiful as it sounds, they had no choice.

They were persecuted.

They knew that at any time, any or all of them could be arrested, thrown in prison, tortured or put to death.

By the time this passage was written,

the Apostles had already been arrested once and

brought before the same leaders who condemned Jesus to death.

Soon after this passage, Stephen became the first martyr and widespread persecutions of the church began.

Times were desperate.

The disciples needed each other.

Community was essential for survival - for dealing with the unknowns and finding courage to face their fears.

That's why they came together and shared their resources.

That's why they worshipped and prayed together.

They needed a support system and they found it in 'community'.

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You will find the support you need in community.

The message today is clear.

Going it alone doesn't work.

You can't remain isolated.

It's not how Christ planned for his disciples to live.

He never ever intended them to go it alone.

That's why he formed a small group of followers called the Twelve Apostles.

It's why he sent his disciples out in pairs to share the Good News.

It's why he told them to pray in groups - said *"where two or three are gathered, there am I in the midst of them."*

Community gave them the strength, support and courage they needed to act in spite of fear.

Without community, the church would not have survived past the first century.

Not only has the church survived, it has thrived.

And community is not only how you will survive, but how you will thrive.

So the first remedy Jesus offers us to deal with our fears is community.

How can you find this community if you are searching for it?

It won't happen magically.

It will require some work and effort on your part.

Here are a few suggestions.

With warmer weather coming,

you can find ways to safely meet with others outside - with family and friends, neighbors and parishioners.

I know of one parish where members invite folks over to watch online Mass outside.

It takes a little effort but it can be a great way to create community.

Here's another way:

try reconnecting with someone you've lost touch with.

Maybe the challenges of the past year have frayed a relationship of your's - a disagreement over politics or the pandemic or racial injustice.

Take the first step to reconnect, to move forward, and restore community.

Make it your goal to reach out this week.

SCREEN: Drop in small group announcement

Here's another opportunity for you:

we are launching a drop-in small group for adults beginning a week from Tuesday, on April 20th.

Many of those who participated in a Lenten small group

told us they wanted more, so we are offering this opportunity for people to gather online this Spring to discuss the Sunday readings and how the message applies to their lives.

Why not join them?

There is more information in the e-bulletin.

And you can always find the weekly small group guide on our website.

SCREEN: Fear Not! main screen

So, several ways you can create and experience community.

And it all begins when you take a step towards others in this Easter season.

I began this message talking about how fear of the unknown keeps us from the life God wants for us.

Jesus doesn't want any of his followers stuck in the dark.

He promises us that if we turn to others for community,

we will be able to face our fears - we'll discover

the strength and support Christ wants for us. Amen. +