

Second Sunday of Easter / Year A / April 19, 2020 (Fr. Giese)

I have said this before but it is worth saying again now, the opposite of faith in God is not doubt, it is indifference. We see this in the gospel passage we just heard in which Jesus appears, in his resurrected body, to the apostles that Easter evening. The first thing he says to them is, "Peace be with you." The disciples rejoice and Jesus says again, "Peace be with you," then he breathes on them in order for them to receive the Holy Spirit, and finally he commissions them to act on his behalf by forgiving sins or retaining them. Thomas, one of the apostles is not there with them when Jesus appears to them and when they tell him that they have seen the Lord, that he is risen, he does not believe them. He doubts. It doesn't matter that they are all saying the same thing and that they are all rejoicing. The news, for him, is too good to be true, so he doubts. The others want him to share in their joy of having seen Jesus. They want him to believe too but he can't. Instead, Thomas lays out conditions for believing what they others have told him about Jesus being risen. He says, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hand and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." He says these things because he doubts. But – he is not indifferent. In fact, Thomas is anything but indifferent. He is upset and frustrated, maybe even angry, angry that he wasn't there at the time that the others said Jesus appeared to them, but he is not indifferent. They must have told him that Jesus had shown them his wounded side and hands as a way of revealing to them that it was really he, Jesus, who was with them. Thomas latches on to that and makes seeing them himself the proof he needs to believe. In fact, seeing them is not enough for Thomas. He needs to examine them physically with his own hand and finger, because he doubts. But he is not indifferent. If Thomas had been indifferent, he would have left them and dismissed them as delusional, or dishonest and gone on with the rest of his life.

But he doesn't do that. He stays with them. He stays for a couple of reasons. One of them is that the apostles and disciples were clearly changed by that experience with the risen Jesus. Even though Thomas did not see it himself, he could see the effects in them, the change in their attitudes, the change in their behavior, the change they had, going from grief and discouragement to joy and hope, changes that did not diminish in the days that followed. The change in them was lasting, permanent. Thomas may have had his doubts about what they told

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him they saw, but there was no doubting the change in them. That is one reason why Thomas stayed on with them.

And then there is the other reason Thomas stayed and this is important. Thomas believed in Jesus. He may have had his doubts about what the others told him of their encounter with Jesus that Easter Sunday night but he believed in Jesus. In the time he had been with Jesus he had witnessed Jesus healing people, people afflicted with blindness from birth, people who were paralyzed, people who were deaf or lame, people sick with leprosy or other diseases and more. He had been a witness to the raising of the brother of Martha and Mary after he had been dead for a number of days, an act of power that would have been unbelievable if he had not seen it. He had also witnessed Jesus feeding the thousands of people on the side of the mountain. And what he had witnessed was more than signs of power. They were signs of the compassion of God worked through Jesus and Thomas believed in Jesus as the Son of Man. Thomas had heard the wisdom of Jesus, listened to him as he revealed the mind and heart of God, watched him as he forgave sins and bestowed mercy. He believed in him.

Thomas had seen the courage of Jesus in the face of hostility and anger and how Jesus was not overcome and did not lose himself. Thomas had even heard Jesus speak of his own death and had been there when Jesus gave, for the first time, his flesh as bread and his blood as wine to nourish and encourage him and the other apostles. Thomas believed in Jesus because he knew him - and loved him. He knew Jesus had loved him too. So, he stayed. He was not indifferent. He may have had his doubts about the report the others gave him but he stayed because he still had faith in Jesus, a faith that came from knowing Jesus and loving Jesus. And that is key thing, for us too, isn't it? You have faith but you have doubts. You always will. They go together. But that doesn't mean you can't have a stronger faith. You can. You want a stronger faith? It doesn't come from believing harder. It comes from loving Jesus more. Spend time with him, like Thomas. Listen to him, like Thomas. Follow him, like Thomas. Seek the company of others who know and love him. Make his words the foundation of your life, like Thomas. Live as a friend of Jesus, like Thomas. Realize, just like Thomas did, that Jesus died for you. Do this, and you will love Jesus more and more and more.

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And you will even find that what Saint Peter wrote and which we heard today is also fulfilled in your life: “Although you have not seen him you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Loving Jesus does that.