

The easy thing to talk about today would be to do some Thomas-bashing: Thomas needed to experience Jesus himself, he needed proof, he didn't believe that Jesus would rise. But really how does that make him any different than all the rest of the disciples? Notice that no one there criticizes Thomas for his lack of faith or for his skepticism. Thomas says he won't believe until he can see for himself that Jesus is alive. What happens next? Do they hear Jesus' voice booming through the room, rebuking Thomas and imposing some penalty on him? No! Jesus immediately appears and meets his demands! Jesus did not criticize Thomas for wanting physical evidence, but rather blessed those who believe without it.

We forget that when Jesus says he is going to Jerusalem to die, it was Thomas boldly said then we will go to die with you. We overlook the fact that in all of scripture there is only one place where Jesus is acknowledged as God without any qualification and that is in the words of Thomas, "My Lord and my God." In many ways Thomas is a model disciple and the fact that he has doubts makes him even more of an example for us.

Doubt is the messy side of our humanity. We want to believe, but we are often besieged with doubts. Sometimes we feel very bad about ourselves. We need to remember that this is all part of being a human being. We will only be free of doubts when we see God face to face.

Doubt comes in a lot of varieties. There is intellectual doubt. If you think you have that whole trinity thing figured out or fully understand how Jesus can be both fully God and fully human, then you are kidding yourself.

The problem here is that we are trying to solve eternal mysteries with the finite knowledge of our intellect. Just because we cannot understand something, does not mean that it isn't true. A seven year old is incapable of understanding calculus. That doesn't mean that theorems of calculus don't exist. It just means that the seven year old's mind cannot grasp them. It takes humility to recognize our dependency on God for knowledge beyond our grasp. But in our pride we sometimes dislike admitting that there are things I can't figure out.

I suspect that Thomas did not doubt Jesus as much as he doubted the other disciples. After all, these were people full of human failings: a tax collector, a political zealot, a leader who had publically denied Christ. Why should Thomas believe these people? It hard to trust others and when we don't like their message we discredit those who are proclaiming it.

A third source of our doubts flows from the separation of faith and morality. The things we say we believe and the things we actually do, don't match. That does not work. It is hard for a person focused only on themselves to put their faith in someone or something else.

Finally the most difficult doubts to overcome are those that come from crises in our lives. A love one becomes sick, or dies, a marriage falls apart, bad things happen and people cry out, "Where is God?" No one has the answers to why bad things happen in the world other than to say that when circumstances rise to the level of suffering it usually suggests that we have failed to make God the priority of life. It is normal for us to cry out in pain, and even to question God. I am sure God sees the love the

person has for those who are hurt by the crises, not a challenge to his existence. None of us escape doubt.

If you believe the church ads on the religion page of most newspapers it seems some churches have it all: choirs, friendliness, powerful preaching, singles ministries, ample parking, family life centers, sensitive child care, and a compassionate spirit.

By contrast the church depicted in our gospel for today has nothing, absolutely nothing. Here, we get our first glimpse of the disciples gathered together after the resurrection, the first glimpse of the church in its earliest days, and it is not a very pretty picture. They were to be a community of profound love with the gates wide open and the welcome mat always out, but here we find them barricaded in a house with the doors bolted shut. They were to be the kind of people who stride boldly into the world to minister in Jesus' name, but here we find them cowering in fear, hoping nobody will find out where they are before they get their alibis straight. In short, we see here the church at its worst -- scared, disheartened and defensive. They certainly had their doubts and so they were in no position to criticize Thomas.

John gives us a snapshot of a church with nothing – no plan, no program, no perky youth ministry, no powerful preaching, no parking lot, nothing. In fact, when all is said and done, this terrified little band huddled in the corner of a room with a chair braced against the door has only one thing going for it: the risen Christ. And that seems to be the main point of this story. In the final analysis, this is not a lament about doubters,

this is a story about how the risen Christ pushed open the bolted door of a church with nothing, how the risen Christ enters the fearful chambers of every church and fills the place with his own life.

Yes we will have to deal with all sorts of doubt in life. That's normal and actually means that we care enough about something to worry over it. Doubts come into our minds at unexpected moments and try to lead us away from the peace the lord gives us.

In these situations we must remember that we are part of a greater whole. We belong to the Church and among its members there are people with varying degrees of faith, some very strong others very weak. We might sit in Church wondering about our own lack of faith but are then inspired by those around us who respond with a strong voice and who clearly believe very firmly. Faith is the common property of the members of the Church, it is shared and we all benefit from our collective beliefs. The opposite of Faith is apathy – not caring at all; doubt means our faith is alive and seeking direction. I'm sure Thomas would tell us that proclaiming Jesus as his lord and God didn't mean his life would ever after be free from doubt but it did mean he had found the path to the answers he sought and he could be at peace with his doubts.

May Christ's peace be with all of you.