

Doubting Thomas

Jesus is Risen!
Risen from the dead!
Alleluia!

Today we hear how he appeared to the disciples, how their unbelief was turned around. Their faith was restored. They were full of joy, rejoicing because Jesus has overcome death.

All of them were exultant except Thomas. What is the matter with Thomas the twin? But then he always was a pessimist.

After His Resurrection Jesus made a most convincing appearance to his disciples: He was suddenly there in the midst of them, and in his risen body too, even though the doors were shut.

To convince them that he wasn't just a ghost, and that he was the crucified one, he showed them his hands and his side. In many important aspects they could see he was the old Jesus, in that he showed them kindness and spoke with authority just like he used to. There was continuity here not only his presence with them but also his character and command. He wished them peace, breathed new life into them and gave them their mission "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you: receive the Holy Spirit". The evidence of his appearance was not confined to just one person, all who were there witnessed his reappearance,. It was very doubtful if they had all fallen asleep and all had the same dream. The only conclusion is that he was definitely with them in person; the Christ resurrected. Now if you had lived with a group of people for three years, knew them intimately, had a special bond of trust and love between you, and they told you what had happened on that dramatic occasion, what Jesus said and what he did would you believe them. I think you would. You would have liked to have been there, seen it for yourself; but I am sure you would not dismiss the whole thing as poppycock just like Thomas did..

Today we live in an age and at a time when faith is becoming more difficult and any mystery that needs explaining is on the way out. We want proof and evidence, now, right now before we truly and wholeheartedly believe. Thank goodness we have the Bible with its Gospels, and theologians and historians with great knowledge who have already studied and investigated the resurrection. Today it should be so much easier to believe and have faith and yet the world still doubts. Why?

People make a big mistake if they think of Thomas as a man of little faith.

Who could really blame him, after what had happened on Good Friday. He had seen the Lord whom he loved deeply, die the death of a criminal, crucified between two thieves, and a few hours earlier he had witnessed Peter the chief disciple promise commitment to Jesus and then heard him deny him three times. Thomas was disheartened, disillusioned and angry, which made him unwilling to accept the word of the others. Thomas was doubtful about the key issue of whether Jesus had risen from the dead and was actually alive. He was a born pessimist. He expected the worst. Remember it was Thomas who stated that he didn't know where Jesus was going and therefore couldn't possibly know the way! Therein lies the heart of our own believing. We do believe in Life after Death don't we? We have to accept this as our belief, for no-one has yet come back to tell us otherwise.

I certainly believe that this is our faith Jesus came to bring us eternal life, life after death, life with him and through him life with God our maker.

When I did funeral training many years ago, this was brought to the fore and even if the relatives who are left might doubt, it is assumed the person who has died will be welcomed to live in the kingdom and receive life eternal.

None of us can be certain what life after death will be like, but we can be certain that God keeps his promise and Eternal Life is his promise to us.

Thomas wanted to believe that and in many ways he echoes moments of our own uncertainty, when we question the whys and wherefores of this life.

During life, faith is an ongoing struggle and there are moments of crisis when our minds are darkened and our vision of God is blurred by clouds of doubt. There is nothing comfortable about believing as it challenges us to change our lives as a result of our encounter with Jesus. Think back to the reading from Acts, how the disciples were persecuted and yet remained firm in their faith. In the book of Revelation it confirms that Jesus is the first born to be raised from the dead, the one who was, and is and is to come.

So today's the day for honest reflection on the depth of our own Easter faith, and a time to ask the Lord to strengthen our conviction and trust in his word. How else as Christians are we linked across the centuries with the disciples of the early church if not by an unbreakable bond of faith? The bottom line of that faith is our belief in Jesus Christ as the Risen Lord.

As descendants of the first Christians, mere belief in Christ as the Son of God is not enough. There must be life in his name.

The gospel made a real impact on the lives of the first believers. They took it to heart and reached out, related and encouraged one another in a prayerful spirit of love.

For us, living a truly Christian life involves putting into practice in our daily lives, the faith we profess to believe. There is no greater example of faith than to live with others in a common spirit of friendship, harmony and love. Faith is a blessing, because it alone gives meaning to our lives and is a driving force to our existence.

When everything else fails and our faith is needed, nothing can compensate for its absence. If we have no faith we are completely lost.

Thomas is renowned for his doubt, but he was also a man of great courage. Thomas was a man with a deep love, a man with a relationship with Jesus that was so strong he didn't ever want to be separated from him. His heart is really broken when he speaks. He is shattered. The thought of losing Jesus paralyses his mind. He had become so associated with Jesus that he would have gladly died with him. He certainly did not want to live without him and was temporarily blind to the resurrection. Jesus is tender with him. He understands doubt. He understands uncertainty. He understands pessimism, but a heroic kind of pessimism because Thomas is willing to die because he loves so profoundly.

History indicates that Thomas may well have taken the good news of the Gospel as far as India. There is in India the Bar Toma Church, sons of Thomas, who trace their origin back to him. Tradition says, because he would not deny the faith and he would not cease preaching, a spear was run through him and he was executed.

So in the end his doubt became certainty and so certain of his reunion with Christ was that he accepted that spear and finally gave up his life to have the reunion which he had longed for all those years between the Ascension of Christ and his own death.

This month on 21st we celebrate the life of St Anselm and I would like to share a prayer of his with you. This is also appropriate for all those doubting Thomases.

Let us pray:

O Lord my God,

Teach me to seek you, for I cannot seek you unless you teach me, or find you unless you show yourselves to me.

Let me seek you in my desire; let me desire you in my seeking. Let me find you by loving you, let me love you when I find you; Amen

Gill Gough