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Church of St. Thomas More, NYC
April 24, 2022
Easter Second Sunday 202 John 22:19-31

This morning's Gospel presents us with the familiar story of "Doubting Thomas." Thomas, the apostle, skeptical, somewhat cynical, yet still searching, stands as a sort of patron saint for so many today. Life today is so much more complicated; the choices we have to make are so much more ambiguous; the pressures so much more severe; the options so much more varied. We know so much more about so many different things that the certainties of the past seem shaken to the foundation.

As Christians, we have no monopoly on the truth, but neither do we have to succumb to the relativism of our age, wherein everybody is right and nobody is wrong. In faith, we begin with the message of Jesus Christ as the search-light that we employ to illuminate the shadows of our lives, the touchstone that will separate illusion from reality. We undertake the journey not with the self-congratulatory arrogance of those who believe they have all the answers even before setting out, nor with the refusal to be enlightened by those walking a different path to the same eventual destination. In short, we continue on the journey of faith to strike a balance between conviction and openness, between surety and discovery.

Because that journey has never been easy, the first generation of Christians, when putting the Gospels together, wrote down for us their own struggle in coming to faith, and especially the hesitancy, the skepticism of Thomas, the apostle. We, like Thomas, can run into the same kinds of difficulties if we let our intellects become the sole criterion of truth---if everything must be clear and distinct according to the categories we are accustomed to use in the affairs of everyday life; if everything has to fit into the boxes and pigeonholes of our limited imagination; if we demand that paradox be banished, mystery eliminated, and ambiguity dismissed. For the paradoxes of faith are no more obscure than the paradoxes of science, of nature, of life itself, and certainly as teeming with possibility and meaning.

Always there will be questions, there will be doubts and uncertainties about one's faith. Yet it is precisely the questions we raise and the doubts we have which may become the opportunity for our faith to grow, to lead us to new areas of life. For the "god" we have been accustomed to worship, and have difficulty believing in, may be a "god" who is too small, a "god" too neatly tailored to the dimensions of our own imagination, an imagination that cannot, or will not, handle all the ambiguities of life. So, if we feel that God has failed us, it may not be the true and living God---who still

waits to be discovered---who has failed us, but only the caricature of God that we have pieced together, perhaps from our experiences of the God-like people in our childhood: parents, teachers, clergy, etc.

The honest, genuine questions that we raise in regard to faith are not to be dismissed, and can bring us closer to recognizing how the living God is working in our lives. The American philosopher, George Santayana, once quipped that "Skepticism is the chastity of the mind." We all need a healthy dose of skepticism lest we rest too comfortably in our beliefs, and are unwilling to see where faith may be leading us. It was after all the skepticism of Thomas that led to the clearest affirmation of faith in the Gospels, when after his doubts Thomas was finally able to say, "My Lord and my God." So, let us be chaste, at least in mind, that we not, to use Biblical imagery, "lusts after false gods," those comfortable caricatures we employ to compensate for and shield us from the realities of life.

Let me say one more word about faith and the lack of faith, and the benefit that faith can provide. We often hear it said that "Some things have to be seen in order to be believed". That seems to express the attitude of the hard-nosed realist--prove it to me. But the opposite can be equally true, and perhaps for the things that matter most in life, it can be even truer, i.e., "Some things have to be believed in order to be seen." Unless we are open to the possibility of something's existence, we may very well fail to recognize the signs that indicate its presence when it does appear.

Even in the world of science, which many would point to as the most rational of endeavors, it is belief, a certain kind of scientific faith in a theory, a hunch that always precedes discovery. Only because scientists believed that the same basic laws of nature and mathematics that are operative on earth are also operative in the farthest reaches of the universe, only because they believed that before ever actually getting there, were they inclined to make the investigations that eventually confirmed their intuitions. If Galileo had not believed that the moon was of the same kind of stuff as was the earth, and not some kind of ethereal substance, he would not have been led to discover the craters on the moon with his telescope.

Again "some things have to be believed in order to be seen." If we have a closed mind, if we dismiss at the outset the very possibility of something's existence, then we will inevitably fail to recognize it as it appears before our eyes. That could be true for God, for other people, and for ourselves. If one denies the possibility of God's existence, then he or she will be inclined to write off any signs of transcendence, any indications that there is something more to life than what can be measured or calculated. If one denies the possibility that a person can ever change, then one may

miss the signs of real growth in that person's character. If we sell ourselves short, saying I could never possibly accomplish this or that---if I do not believe in myself---then when challenges appear, I may simply walk away, rather than recognizing I do indeed have the inner resources to meet them. It is faith, whether in God or in other people, or in one's self, that always comes first. Faith enables us to see what may be right before our eyes, but which a lack of faith would dismiss as inconsequential.

A constant theme of the Gospels is that faith is a kind of "vision;" faith enables us to see what is really they are. So, with the "eyes of faith," let us go forth to behold all that God sets before us--to appreciate it, to develop it, to share it, to preserve it--but never to write it off or to dismiss it, never to deny what may be staring us in the face.