

AUGUST 13, 2023: 19TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



When I returned from vacation, I had a text from the person who was caring for my cats: “Welcome back—hope you had a great vacation! And for the record, I still don’t believe you have two cats (lol).” I responded with, “Thanks, but they both came out to greet me!” and sent her a picture of them. When we talked later, she told me that she knew they were there because the food was gone and the kitty litter needed to be cleaned. But she still was not certain.

Our relationship with God can often feel this way. Sometimes we look at our lives and we wonder where He is. At times we might even question if He actually exists. We come to a point where we are not sure how we are supposed to discover God in our lives. It can create a true crisis of faith. This was even seen in the early Church when Thomas refused to believe the other disciples that Jesus had risen and appeared to them: “Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.’”

Thomas only came to believe when Jesus showed up again, and in that moment Thomas even saw something more. It was not just a person come from back from the dead. A truth arose in Thomas’ heart and he uttered those powerful words, “My Lord and my God.” He recognized the fundamental reality of who Jesus is—not just



a human being but truly God. We recognize now, in faith, that Jesus is both fully human and fully God at the same time. He is the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity. He is truly the Son of God.

One of the most poignant truths we discover in the Gospels is that the disciples continually did not recognize who Jesus was. But when Jesus asks Peter, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter responds, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus makes clear that Peter’s response did not simply come from some human reasoning. Peter did not figure this out on his own; rather, it came as a gift from God. It takes an openness to God’s grace to fully acknowledge the truth of Christ. But, shortly after this encounter, when Jesus speaks about his coming death and resurrection, Peter rebukes Him. He tells Jesus not to talk about this. Jesus responds by telling Peter, “Get behind me, Satan.”

The truths of our Christian faith can be hard to hear, appreciate, and live out. This has been true since the very beginnings of our faith. And yet Jesus makes clear that it is necessary to come to really understand who He is. He tells us, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through me.” Even today we hear the same arguments from people who tell us that it is necessary to change. When Jesus spoke about the Eucharist, people responded by saying, “This saying is too difficult” and so they walked away. Jesus looked at the disciples and asked, “Do you also want to leave?” Peter responded, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.” And yet Peter will eventually deny that he even knows Jesus. He will deny Him three times.

The journey of following Jesus is neither simple nor easy. It will have its ups and downs. Our lives are *not* about following Jesus perfectly—that is not possible. It is *not* about accepting easily the real teachings of Christ proclaimed by the Church. When we struggle with trying to discern the truths of our faith, it is actually an act of love. It shows that we care enough to struggle for a deeper understanding and appreciation of the life God is calling us to live. The struggle of Christians to follow Christ has always existed and will always be a reality in our journey of faith. The real problem we have is when we give up the struggle and simply walk away because it is too difficult.

My friend could have simply decided: "If I do not see the cats, then they are not real and I do not need to come." Rather, she believed what I told her and continued to care for them. We may not always see the fruits of what the Church teaches us about God. We may not always experience God in a way that seems to impact our lives. At times we may well feel like Thomas—show me the proof! I need to see what you are talking about.

The way of faith is not about proof, but trust. We may not always understand a teaching. We may find it difficult to follow or even believe. At times the voice of the world may seem to drown out the voice of Christ and his Church. We may struggle as the world calls us to walk away from our beliefs. But, we must always keep in our hearts the words of Peter: "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God."

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@theholyrood.org , or if easier please call or text me at 978-254-0560.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Fr. Brian