

Some of the greatest pop culture quotes on faith come from villains. I wonder how Darth Vader would have dealt with Thomas in today's gospel: "I find your lack of faith disturbing." Then there's the guy (Walter Donovan) who shot Indiana Jones' dad to make Indy go after the Holy Grail: "Only the power of the grail can save your father now. It is time to ask yourself what you believe." Obviously Jesus is not a villain—there is no greater hero than Jesus—but he does require faith...and there are passages in the gospels in which he forces his followers to ask themselves what they believe and even, at times, he finds their lack of faith disturbing. As much fun as it would be for me to talk about Darth Vader, it is the challenge to Indiana Jones that is the most applicable to the first two Easter gospels: It is time for us to ask ourselves what we believe.

Last Sunday we heard about three different reactions to the empty tomb and we heard Thomas' reaction to Jesus' appearance today. Mary Magdalene believed Jesus was dead until he called her by name. John believed but what he believed is unclear—it could have been everything from that the tomb was empty to a full-blown belief in the resurrection. We don't know about Peter except that clues given to us by John suggest that regardless of what Peter believed, he was hanging on to his guilt about denying that he knew Jesus on the night before his passion and that guilt was keeping him stuck in the darkness at the empty tomb with no Jesus in sight. Thomas clearly did not believe when told by the other apostles that Jesus had appeared. Like Mary Magdalene, he had to see in order to believe.

Saint Thomas is the apostle for the modern age. "I gotta see it to believe it." "If you want me to believe what you are telling me, show me the science behind it." It is very hard for many of us today to take that leap of faith...but, remember the new beatitude that Jesus gives us in this gospel: "Thomas, have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." Jesus is talking about us. Jesus is calling us to trust in him rather than the physical things of the world around us which are passing away.

One reason why we might tend to place our faith in things we can see is that to do otherwise requires us to make ourselves vulnerable. Think about Thomas. It was easier for him to deny the Resurrection rather than believe what his friends had told him because he didn't want to be given false hope and then have those hopes dashed if it turned out that the other apostles had experienced a Mass hallucination or something...so Thomas refused to believe until he had tangible evidence that he could touch. It can be the same for us. When we have

to trust in something or someone outside of our control we are afraid that we'll get hurt so it is safer not to believe and not to trust.

Another reason why we might be more inclined to doubt than to believe is that sometimes belief—faith—requires conversion and conversion can be hard; sometimes it is easier to just refuse to believe and walk away. A few years ago we were told by the Pew research people that around 70 percent of people who call themselves Catholics did not believe in the true presence of Jesus—body, blood, soul, and divinity—in the Eucharist. That number—approximately 70 percent—is similar to the number of those who call themselves Catholics who do not attend Mass regularly. That is not a coincidence. If we truly believe that Jesus is present in that little white wafer and if we believe that Jesus is truly God and we say we love God, shouldn't we do everything possible to get as close as we can to him? He is always with us in spirit but that is a different type of presence than his physical presence in the Eucharist. Believing in the Eucharist in this way should make us want to change our behavior—but conversion is hard, too hard for many people so they refuse to believe and just walk away.

God never hurts us. He might stretch us, he might not give us what we want when we want it, but when he does this or allows it to happen, it is for our greater good. The worst thing we can do is to give up on God and turn our backs on him. Jesus can appear in the middle of a room without even walking through the door, but he can't get into our hearts unless we let him in. There is a painting of Jesus standing outside of a house knocking on a door. A man seeing this painting said to his son, "why doesn't he just go in?" The boy answered, "There is no handle on the outside." We have to open the door and let Jesus in. Believing in what we have not seen is the first step that we have to take in opening the doors of our hearts to Jesus.

We are all here at Mass today—that's great, but might some of us feel like Mary Magdalene, Peter, and Thomas with some shadow hanging over us that we need Jesus to chase away? Today is Divine Mercy Sunday. There will be a Eucharistic holy hour here in the Church from 3-4 pm and I will be available for confessions in the parish hall during that time. That holy hour might be a good time to open those doors to Jesus.

What do we believe? Where is our faith challenged? How is Jesus calling us to grow in faith and trust in him? It is time to seriously ask ourselves what we believe. Hopefully, instead of finding our lack of faith disturbing, Jesus will be amazed at how solid our faith is in the face of so many challenges. May he declare us to be among the blessed who have believed without seeing.