

## **Fr Tom's Homily - Second Sunday of Easter: When Doubts Come**

The Sunday after Easter always presents the Gospel of Doubting Thomas. The reasoning is that the events in today's gospel take place one week after the Lord rose from the dead. Perhaps, the deeper reason is that our belief in the Resurrection is based on our faith. We have faith that Jesus fulfilled the Scriptural prophecies that he would suffer, die and rise up on the third day.

However, faith is always going to be met with doubts. This is part of the human condition. We will not be free from all doubts until we see God face to face in eternity. I love the story of the man with whose son was suffering from some form of what we would call epilepsy. You find this in Gospel of Mark 9:15-29. Jesus came upon quite a scene, a lot of noise and yelling. People all gathered, seeming to be upset over something. Jesus asked, "What's going on?" A man replied, "Sir, my son suffers from a spirit that seizes him, throws him down, causes him to foam from the mouth and roll around." Jesus queried, "How long has this been happening?" The man responded, "Since childhood, sometimes he is thrown into the water or into a fire. Sir, if you can do anything, please help him." Jesus replied, "If I can. Everything is possible for someone who has faith." Instantly, the boy's father yelled out, "I do believe, Lord. Help those parts of me that don't believe." With that, the Lord healed the boy. Do we doubt? Must we wait for an incident to happen, then it makes us hungry for God shouting out, "Help those parts of me that don't believe!" That is our prayer too when we realize how little our faith is at times; when we doubt.

We have many challenges to our faith. It takes a tremendous amount of humility to have faith. Having faith demands that we recognize that we do not have all the answers to the questions of life. Some answers can only be given to us through faith, In His Time. The areas of doubt in our lives comes through intellectual reasons, as well as through physical challenges. A person becomes seriously ill. A loved one dies. A child dies. It is quite normal for us to ask,

“Where were you God when I, when we, were going through this?” God’s answer is that He is with us holding us up, helping us get through and even grow stronger in our faith when it is challenged. God sees the pain the person is suffering. He is crying with us, just as Jesus cried at the tomb of Lazarus. He tells us to use our challenges to draw closer to Him. We can, and we do! Is our faith stronger in the face of the COVID-19?

Another time doubt enters into our lives is when someone is attacking us for our Catholic faith. Usually they are anti-Catholic extremists, and say things like, “You Catholics don’t read the Bible” or “You worship Mary”. After a while that wears us down. At times, peer pressure takes over and we start thinking that there is something wrong with us if we are not seeing things like everybody else. That is when we really need to express our faith and say to others and even to ourselves, “I respect the beliefs of others and simply ask them to respect my belief.”

We cannot separate our faith from our actions. Please take note: *If we stop behaving like a Christian we will soon stop BELIEVING like a Christian.* Are we just giving lip service to our faith? Jesus looked at Thomas and said, “Do not be unbelieving, but believe.” Thomas then said, “My Lord and My God.” Then Jesus said something extremely important for us all to remember, he said, “You believe because you have seen. Blessed are those who have not seen and believe.” Jesus was talking about us. He was considering all of us gathered right here and throughout the world, throughout history, and saying “Bless you, my friends for believing.” So when doubts come, whether due to others or circumstances, or due to things welling up inside us, we need to say, “Lord, I do believe. Help those parts of me that don’t believe.” We need to trust that the Lord who promised to give us all good things, will give us faith.

## **Father Tom's Homily - Divine Mercy Sunday 2020**

Indeed, the Corona Virus has restricted us to assemble as a community of faith and pray on this Second Sunday of Easter—as a day particularly well-suited to the solemn celebration of gift of divine mercy. For, as Pope John Paul declared, divine mercy is “truly an Easter gift to humanity”. What happens on the very day when Christ rose from the dead, in his very first appearance to the disciples: What were his first words to them? “Peace be with you,” he said twice. And then? “As the Father has sent me, so I send you”. When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven, and whose sins you retain are retained.” Pope John Paul said that divine mercy is an Easter gift because the risen Christ's first concrete action is to establish the Holy Sacrament of Mercy. Christ gives to his disciples the power to forgive sins.

This first gift of Easter is itself an act of mercy. God has given a sacramental and thus tangible form to the bestowal of His mercy. He fits his gift of mercy to our human nature. Not only can we express our need for divine mercy in private prayer but God has instituted a sacramental form through which to impart His mercy. By doing so, a sacred ritual comprised of words and gestures, we may speak to Him with unqualified assurance, and most importantly, He can speak to us. In the Sacrament of reconciliation, Christ presents himself sacramentally to us in the person of the priest confessor who speaks and acts, as the Church declares, “in persona Christi” which means In the Person of Christ. It is to Christ that we confess our sins, and it is from Christ that we receive mercy and pardon. Just as the gift of faith is imparted to Thomas in the gospel's context of a direct personal encounter with Christ, so is the gift of divine mercy granted to us in a sacramental encounter with Christ. He who is hearing our sins, our sorrow for them, and our firm purpose of amendment; He forgives and fortifies us in his grace and mercy.

Recall that Thomas was absent when Jesus first appeared to the apostles, and he refused to believe them. But the following week, when Christ again appears to the disciples, he speaks directly to Thomas: “Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.” Thomas answered, “My Lord and my God!” Our Lord confronted Thomas’s reluctance to believe very directly. He presented himself, indeed his very body - the nail marks in his hands and the wound in his side - so that Thomas could actually touch them. Confession is just like this. As Christ meets Thomas’s unbelief head-on by presenting himself to him in person, so he wants to encounter us directly when we seek his mercy.

As Pope Francis shared in his homily: “There may be a few obstacles, which close the door of the heart. There is the temptation to lock the doors, or to live with our sin, thinking we are no worse than others. This, however, is how the locks of the soul are closed and we remain shut inside, prisoners of evil. Another obstacle is the “shame” of unlocking the secret door of the heart. There is a third downside which is “distancing” ourselves from that door: it happens when we hide in our misery, when we ponder constantly, connecting it to negative things, until sinking into the darkest repositories of the soul”. But locked doors do not restrict Christ’s entry into our hearts. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” In quoting the wisdom of Pope Francis: “The Lord’s grace alone frees us. Therefore, let us be reconciled, let us listen to Jesus who says to those who are weary and oppressed: “Come to me” (Matthew 11:28). Divine Mercy - won for us by the passion, death and resurrection of Christ which we have celebrated in this Easter Season is the tangible expression by which God looks with merciful forgiveness on our sins and the sins of the whole world. We continue to give thanks “to the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endures forever.” Amen.