

This week, we get the story of Doubting Thomas. In the three-year cycle of the Holy Scriptures called, "The Lectionary," the story of Doubting Thomas always falls on the first Sunday after Easter. By now many of you probably know this story by heart. I always say that I feel bad for Thomas because he is forever stuck with the nickname, "Doubting", even though he did nothing different. If you remember, none of the disciples believed Mary Magdalene when she told them she had seen the Lord. Her testimony is dismissed as an idle tale...gossip. But when Thomas doubts the disciples, he is called "Doubting Thomas." I cannot blame him, nor can I really blame the other disciples, for having doubts about the resurrection of Jesus, to some degree. I mean, they did just see their Messiah, their leader, be crucified on the cross and buried in a tomb. On the other hand, it's not like people raising from the dead was completely unknown to them. I mean, they saw what Jesus did with Lazarus. And weren't they there when Jesus saved the Roman Centurion's daughter? And surely they heard the story of Elijah saving the widow's so, right? I mean, they get a pass because it is illogical and unnatural...in the literal sense of the word...it goes against nature to be raised from the dead. And I guess with Elijah and the daughter and Lazarus, there was someone holy to assist in their resurrection, but Jesus does it all on his own. All that is to say, I don't think it's fair for us to continue calling Thomas the doubting disciple.

I would argue that the central theme of today's passage is not the shaming of Thomas nor his doubt. Rather, I think that the central theme of today's passage is verse 28, "Thomas responded to Jesus, 'My Lord and my God!'" Thomas' declaration of Jesus as his Lord and God is important in the Gospel of John. In fact, it is the first time that anyone declares the divinity of Jesus. Yes, while on the cross, the Roman centurion declares, "Surely this is the son of God." But that is not quite the same thing. This is the first time that one of his disciples, one of his followers, one of his closest friends and companions, declares Jesus to be God. Doubt and questions and fear kept the disciples in the upper room, even after Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on them. It would keep them in the upper rooms until the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descends upon them and thrusts them out into the very ends of the Earth. Thomas' declaration of Jesus' divinity is the beginning of the new Jesus' movement...one that would ultimately lead the Church to its present location today.

In the midst of all the confusion and heartache and pain and grief of Good Friday, the early reports of Mary Magdalene and the other disciples of Jesus' resurrection must have been seen as an idle tale or gossip. I cannot blame Thomas for his doubts. When he encounters the resurrected Jesus for himself, and hears Jesus speak to him, "believe!", that is when things got real for Thomas. And I think there are a lot of people who can identify with that struggle. I personally know a lot of people who demand proof like Thomas. "If he appeared to Thomas and the disciples, he can appear to us!", they say. I wish I had the proof of the resurrection like they did. All I have to go on is my own personal experiences in faith.

In this time of chaos and confusion, when things are stressed and anxious and worrisome, I know that it can be overwhelming at times. I am pretty lucky and privileged in this time, to be honest. I am pretty healthy. I am financially secure. I have a family who can support me if I need it. I have food to eat and a home to live in. Even so, I am still feeling the effects of anxiety and stress. All of us are. It can be so overwhelming at times. I have had to quit watching the news before I go to bed and leave my cellphone on do not disturb during the night because every headline is another potential sleep deiver. I bring all of this up today because I have to believe that the disciples were worried and anxious and stressed out too. They went through something extremely traumatic. In fact, during this story, they are still going through the trauma. They are still afraid for their own lives. And so, for Jesus to show up in their midst and give them peace must have been an awe-stuck moment. It sure was for Thomas. He proclaims proudly and loudly, "My Lord and my God!"

In these times, I encourage you to look for the helpers, as St. Fred Rogers once said. Whenever there is tragedy, look for the helpers. I would add that in finding the helpers, there you find Jesus. Jesus is there in the midst of the first responders and the nurses and doctors. Jesus is there with the scientists working for a cure and vaccine. Jesus is there with the families who are grieving. We do not have to look hard to see Jesus at work around us. Are we looking? Do you see him? In this time, I encourage you to look hard for Jesus...and if you don't see him, keep looking, because maybe he is showing up through you and your hard work. Jesus is showing up in the locked doors of our lives. He is showing up right when we

least expect him. May we be on the look out for him as we continue to do the work he calls us to do in our communities and lives. Be on the look out for the helpers because there you will find Jesus. And when we see him, let us be bold enough to proclaim like Faithful Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" Amen.