

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER (B-2024)

Our readings today are very much about faith, but not just any faith. Rather, they are about faith in some particular thing, namely, in our Lord's resurrection from the dead. In our first reading, we hear of how the Apostles **"bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."** Their witness helped the community of believers to be of **"one heart and mind."**

Our holy gospel today speaks to the resurrection directly. It tells us of how Jesus appeared to the Apostles and said to them, **"Peace be with you."** At that point, they all rejoiced. It was here that Jesus gave them power to forgive sins in His name. The following week, Jesus again appeared to the Apostles, and this time, Saint Thomas was with them (he had been absent on Easter Sunday). The gospel then tells us of how Saint Thomas responded when he himself saw Jesus. He exclaimed, **"My Lord and my God."**

Since belief in the Lord's bodily resurrection is central to our Catholic faith, I am going to say more about it now. But, before I do, let me say a bit about faith in general and about what faith is. Here is how the author of Hebrews defines faith. He says,

"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Heb 11:1)."

Note that we are talking about the supernatural virtue of faith here. It is one of the three theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity). When the word faith is used in this sense, it refers to things we accept but for which we have no evidence.

This idea of supernatural faith becomes more clear if we consider how natural faith works. Let me explain. Faith in general is not only necessary, but it's essential in our day to day lives. Just think about how little we actually know and how much we accept on faith.

When you're at the store and pick up a few things, do you add up the cost of everything yourself or do you believe what the clerk says you owe? Do you know for sure that the can of corn you picked up actually contains corn and not beans? On your drive home do you verify all the news you hear on the radio. No. Most of us simply believe what others tell us. We accept what they say is true, and there is a very good reason for this.

If we did not have faith in what others say, life would become almost impossible. If we had to verify everything we were told, we would never get anything done. So we have human faith. Human faith can be defined as belief in the word of another without evidence, and the motivation for this faith is based on the trustworthiness of the person who is speaking to us.

Now this kind of faith also works with supernatural truths. Supernatural faith is when we believe in something because God told us about it through His Church, and there are many things we believe but which we cannot verify.

For example, we believe there are three persons in God. We believe there is sanctifying grace. We believe that our Blessed Mother was assumed into heaven body and soul, and so on. Notice that we cannot verify these things by some investigation or study.

Nevertheless, we are convinced they are true. There are also things we hope for such as salvation and everlasting life, and we have the assurance in our hearts they too will come to pass.

This assurance and this conviction are the result of the supernatural virtue of faith. It is this gift, a gift we received at baptism, which gives us the ability and assurance that our belief in these supernatural truths, presented to us by the Church, but without evidence is well founded.

Now, here is why our faith in the Resurrection is so important. Our Lord's resurrection confirms all that we know about Jesus and about what He has told us to be necessary for our salvation. It is like the motor for a car or fuel for a power plant or the energy of the sun for life on earth.

Without the resurrection, our Catholic faith would be an empty shell, and we would still be in our sins. There would be no point to anything we do as Catholic Christians. As Saint Paul said, our faith would be in vain (1Cor 15:14).

So, in a very real way, we are all in the position of Saint Thomas during that first Easter week. He had not seen Jesus as had the other apostles. He only had their word that Jesus had risen and was alive. At first, he refused to believe what the other Apostles had told him. He refused to believe that Christ had risen from the dead. It was just too much for him. Perhaps he thought the others were suffering from some kind of collective delusion or maybe even playing some kind of cruel joke on him. In any event, he simply 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.”

Remember here that Saint Thomas had always been loyal to the Lord. We can find proof of this when we recall the time Jesus was preparing to go to Jerusalem and some of the Jews had resolved to kill Him. It was then Saint Thomas said, **“Let us also go that we may die with Him.”**

At the same time, we also know that Saint Thomas was weak in faith and today's gospel confirms this. Even though he followed Jesus everywhere, and even though he saw the works which our Lord performed, he had trouble believing. So much so that throughout history, his example has been held up as the kind of faith we should **NOT** imitate. In fact, most of us have heard the phrase “doubting Thomas.” Perhaps a few of us have even been accused of being one.

In any event, a week after the Apostles had seen Jesus, they were again together, and this time Saint Thomas was with them. Again, Jesus appeared to them all. Again, Jesus said to them, **“Peace be with you.”** Then He turned to Saint Thomas and said, **“Take your finger and examine my hands. Put your hand into my side.”** Saint Thomas responded with these words, **“My Lord and my God.”**

At this point, Saint Thomas had the evidence he needed. Faith was no longer necessary. He did not need to rely on the words of another; he no longer had to rely on human testimony. Now he could see with his own eyes that Christ was alive and had indeed risen from the dead.

However, after Saint Thomas had said, **“My Lord and my God,”** Jesus did not praise him; Jesus did not congratulate him. Rather, Jesus said to him, **“You became a believer because you saw me. Blest are they who have not seen and have believed.”**

Today, we are in the same position as was Saint Thomas before Jesus appeared to him. We have not seen Jesus Christ with our own eyes, either before or after His resurrection. We have not heard His voice. While some of us may have witnessed miracles, most of us have not. Just like Saint Thomas, we do not have hard evidence, scientific knowledge, of Christ's resurrection.

That means we have to rely on the word of others for our knowledge of the resurrection. This teaching is something which has been passed on by the Church from one Christian to another and has as its source, Jesus Christ Himself.

Just as the apostles couldn't prove to Saint Thomas that they had seen the risen Christ, so too we can't prove to others that our belief in the resurrection is true, but that does not make it false. While we don't have external evidence, we do have confirmation in other ways.

We have first of all our supernatural faith, that gift of God which gives us assurance and confidence that what the Church presents to us is true and worthy of our belief. This is also what gives us the power to believe in the Holy Trinity or in the existence of sanctifying grace or in the bodily assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

However, we also have confirmation in other ways. We have a personal verification based on the answers to our prayers, based on the consolations God gives us in time of trial, and especially based on the peace we have after receiving the sacrament of penance worthily.

In addition, there are also external confirmations to our faith. The very existence of the Church is one of these. If the Catholic Church were simply a human institution, there is no earthly reason why after almost 2000 years it should still be around. No other human institution is this old. There is no other nation or religion or human institution that has maintained its core characteristics intact over this period of time.

Another confirmation are those things which are easy to understand by people of faith, things which intrigue scientists, and clearly puzzle those who have no faith. These would include the documented miracles and cures at such places as Lourdes in France, Fatima in Portugal, the shrine of Saint Anne de Beaupre in Quebec, and of course the now famous shroud of Turin.

However, in the end, for those of us who believe, no proof in the resurrection is necessary; for those who do not, no proof is sufficient. As our first reading tells us, we are a community of believers. As members of the Church, of this community of believers, we have a common faith. It has been taught to us and has been passed down to us through the Church.

Saint Thomas had to decide if he would believe, and so do we. Saint Thomas rejected the testimony of his fellow apostles, and we can reject the testimony of the Church. On the other hand, we can accept the Church's teachings on faith, and if we do, then Christ's words **“Blest are you who have not seen and have believed”** will apply to us directly. Amen.