

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter – Homily by Fr. Dan Donovan (April 15, 2012)**

The fact that **Thomas** in today's gospel initially refuses to believe what the others tell him about their experience of the risen Jesus has made him for many a sympathetic and even consoling figure. It is not difficult to identify with Thomas, especially in a world like ours where religion and religious people so often fail and in doing so give all religions, a bad name. Many of us are assailed at different times by doubt, doubt in our own abilities and decisions, doubt in the meaningfulness of our life, doubt in God or at least in God's care and concern for us.

If today's gospel **begins with doubt**, it ends with a remarkable act of faith. Thomas' proclamation of Jesus as "my Lord and my God" represents a highpoint of faith in Jesus, in the gospel of John and in all the gospels. In spite of that, it is not the climax of the incident. Jesus' response to Thomas shifts the focus to future believers, to people like ourselves. "Blessed are those," he says, "who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Today's second reading also speaks of faith. "This is the victory," it declares, "that conquers the world, our faith." Faith here, as throughout the New Testament, is faith both in the saving power of Jesus' death and resurrection and in Jesus himself as the Son of God in human form.

For the **first disciples of Jesus** the reality of God was all but self-evident. He was for them both the creator of the world and the Lord of human history. They knew from their own past and from the sacred books that bore witness to it that he was a God of salvation and liberation. He had formed them into a people and been present with them in the ups and downs, the triumphs and defeats, of their history. Although he sometimes seemed distant, he had never abandoned them. They were confident that he would one day bring about the final and definitive coming of his kingdom.

The questions raised for their faith by the life and destiny of Jesus had to do with whether or not he had come from God, had spoken God's word, was an instrument of God's saving activity on their behalf. The answer to their questions turned on the Easter message. To believe that God had raised Jesus from the dead was to believe that Jesus was indeed God's man, that God was with and in him in the course of his life, and that through his death and resurrection God was bringing about a new and definitive moment in his relationship to humanity. As Christians reflected on the implications of what God had done and was doing for them through Jesus, they deepened their understanding of, and faith in, the person of Jesus. "Who is it that conquers the world," John asks, "but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

The word "world" here does not refer primarily to the earth and the cosmos as God's good creation, but rather to human beings and especially to us as turned in on ourselves, as so captivated by, so taken up with, our concerns that we are unable to raise our sights beyond them to the mysterious presence of God in our lives and in the world.

The **starting point** for faith today is very different from that of the original disciples of Jesus. God and especially God's saving presence to human history are anything but self-evident. A contemporary road to faith can take many forms. I remember an artist once saying to me that for him to paint was an act of faith. Recently I saw a lovely movie entitled "Salmon Fishing in Yemen." It contains a number of fascinating exchanges on the theme of faith between a Muslim believer and a non-religious British scientist. Without some kind of faith, it is difficult to imagine people getting up in the morning, going to work, having children, being courageous and hopeful in the face of the inevitable challenges of life.

Faith, even in this broad sense of the word, is always an overcoming of the world, an overcoming, among other things, of our tendency to cynicism and despair, to selfishness and

self-centeredness.

Today's first reading offers a glimpse of a striking phenomenon that marked, at least for a moment, the early Christian community in Jerusalem. People put their possessions in common, we are told, and as a result there was not a needy person among them; "to each was distributed as any had need."

It was faith, faith in the new possibilities for human life opened up by the death and resurrection of Jesus that led believers to this remarkable act of solidarity and of mutual love. All those who believed, Acts says, "were of one heart and one soul."

Faith always leads to action of one kind or another. When that action is positive and life-giving, when it is rooted in and fosters love, then it cannot help but strengthen the faith that gave rise to it. Faith and love are inseparable. They reinforce one another. Both, in different ways, open us to God and to what he has done for us in Christ.