

## Sermon by Christopher Girata

John 20:19-31  
(2<sup>nd</sup> Easter – Year C)  
15 April 2007

Doubt is a very common emotion. Doubt is a part of our human nature. Doubt can represent our desire to question the world around us and seek deeper truths. Today's Gospel lesson focuses on one of the greatest stories of doubt. Thomas, remembered for his glaring doubt or *unbelief*, questions Jesus' resurrection from the dead even after his friends claim they have seen him. Yet even with such strong doubt, Thomas speaks the greatest phrase of faith in any Gospel – “My Lord and my God!” Yet that confession, the strongest of any in the Gospels, comes from a disciple we often name as a “doubter.” Thomas stands as a shining example of how profound unbelief can be transformed into profound belief in an instant. Thomas' honest doubt of Jesus' resurrection, a vulnerable expression as his deep desire for truth, positioned him for a great transformation of faith.

The resurrection must have been so clear to Thomas and the other disciples. They were huddled in a dark place, unsure of their future and without the confidence to move forward, when to their surprise, Jesus came walking back into their lives. Jesus strengthened their faith by literally showing them the marks on his body – the marks of his crucifixion and death. Their fearful doubt was transformed into confident faith. When standing face to face with Jesus, a friend who bears the scars of the horrible death he experienced only days before, how could they *not* have faith? How could they go on questioning his resurrection? He was standing right there!

But doubt can creep back in over time. Stories are told and passed down through generations. Families change, the world changes, and now, 2000 years later, we are faced with an uncertain world. Global crises, unimagined in previous generations, plague the media and crowd our minds. Concern for the future has, unfortunately, become a regular part of our life. Doubt can consume us when we face the uncertainties of our future. How many of us want badly to believe in a God who saves us from the perils of our world? Yet believing in the unseen can be difficult when we have such little tangible proof. Jesus, after

all, has never come to stand before me and, I dare say, he hasn't stood before any of you, either.

Proof is often a bad word when we consider our Christian faith. The desire for proof can call into question the honesty of our faith. Yet I cannot help but want to prove God's presence just as I can prove that I am standing in this pulpit! Proof of God is not always apparent in our world. So much uncertainty swirls around us, so much points to the absence of God, how can we be blamed for questioning God's real and true presence in the world? When it seems like the future is uncertain, how do we know for sure that God is really here?

Even with so much turmoil in the wider world, we live out our lives in relative safety. We have little cause to worry as we walk to our cars and drive to work, as we run errands around town, or meet for meals with friends. Yet many of us experience the regular nagging, perhaps even doubt, that there must be more to what we see day in and day out. We are all searching for something more - we desire and even hope for meaning beyond our daily lives.

Our gospel lesson tells a story about a man who, like us, is searching and hoping for something more. Thomas was born a poor fisherman. I imagine he was not provided with much education outside of the "family business." Yet I also imagine that Thomas, like many of us, yearned for something more than his daily routine, more than just another net of fish. I think Thomas imagined changing the world for the better. One day, his hope was fulfilled in meeting a traveling teacher named Jesus. Thomas quickly became a very confident and courageous member of Jesus' inner circle. Counted among the twelve, Thomas was a passionate follower of Jesus, believing in the hope Jesus promised, even remarking that the disciples should follow Jesus so that they could "die with him." Thomas believed and hoped in the promise that Jesus would overturn the evils of the world and realize God's kingdom on earth. He saw proof of God's presence through the miraculous acts and teachings of Jesus - and he believed.

However, Thomas' faith in Jesus was challenged. He believed in Jesus as a man of strong political action and had faith in his ability to overturn the misguided Jewish leadership. He never expected his teacher to be killed in such a terrible way for seemingly no gain. After Jesus' death, I imagine Thomas must have been lost with grief. All that he had planned to accomplish with Jesus was gone. In less than a week after Jesus' triumphal ride into Jerusalem, he was dead – dead at the hands of the unrighteous political and religious authorities of the land – and along with him died the hope of transforming the world. Hope of transformation was what kept Thomas energized. Hope for transforming the wrongs of the world was what he found in Jesus. The hope of transforming a simple human life into a life lived for the good of all died that day. The loss of hope felt heavy on the shoulders of that lonely fisherman...perhaps too heavy.

So, too, we can find ourselves swallowed by the grief of loss and uncertainty. Most of the time we believe that we can control most of what we see and do. But occasionally, our pleasant realities are shattered by something tragic. No matter how it happens, to a friend, to a loved one, or even to us, an unexpected tragedy can turn our lives upside down. Surprise bad news can upset the sense of control we believed we held over our lives. The loss of a loved one to illness or even death can strike deep into our hearts. Tragedy can often call into question our dependence on others and our need for God. Doubt can begin to replace our sense of God's presence, even to the degree that we can lose our faith. When such tragedies strike, we may spin completely away from our relationship with God, questioning his love for us. In those moments, those grieving moments, the confusion and pain of life can become overwhelming.

Those moments have been shared with us through countless generations in countless ways, and will continue. However, our Gospel lesson gives us a clear message about the way in which God responds to that despair. Even Thomas' daunting denial of faith in the risen Christ cannot keep God from seeking a relationship with Thomas. Jesus comes knocking on the door and offers the proof that Thomas needed to see in order to believe. Jesus offered his wounds, the wounds that Jesus bore on behalf of Thomas and all of us, so that Thomas might believe.

God knows our doubts. He can sense when life has gone awry and when our faith is waning. God has experienced the pain of life *and* death, and God knows what we need. Even in our unbelief, God seeks to make us believers. Perhaps we may not receive such a direct and physical sign as did Thomas, but God still provides us with the evidence, the proof, of his love for us each day. God can reach out farther than we can hope and he can climb over any doubt we have created to block him. All that is left for us to do is simply want him. We need only to want him to be present in our lives and he will transform us. Love's transformative power triumphs over even in our greatest doubting and unbelief, even our greatest grief and despair. No matter how difficult the road we walk, God can find us. God will find us and guide us back to belief in his unending love.

Alleluia! Christ is risen indeed, so that we might believe!

Amen.