

MESSAGE FOR SUNDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2021

Psalm 150  
John 20:19-31.

In Christian circles doubt has a bad name. Belief and faith are the hallmarks of a Christian, not doubt and scepticism. But surely, an honest doubter and a truth-seeking sceptic are far more honourable than those who confess everything the Christian faith teaches but never take the time or effort to examine their views.

In our reading from John's Gospel, Thomas reminds us all that to doubt is a natural thing to do at times. Thomas was the one who had not seen the risen Jesus when he first appeared to the disciples. The others told him that they had seen the Lord, but he was sceptical. He doubted. Still, Thomas must have wanted to fit in. He might have said, "Look, friends, I know the answer is supposed to be that I acknowledge that you saw Jesus, but it sure sounds like a ghost to me."

Jesus was not a ghost, of course. He was the risen Christ, as Thomas a week later found out when he was given the chance to see for himself.

The story of Thomas's honesty and forthrightness gives us hope and empowers us in our moments of doubt. We do not have to accept mindlessly whatever seems the expected or accepted answer or view. In the company of fellow Christians, it is OK to be confused and bewildered and afraid and doubtful.

I was reading a story recently about a woman in her 30's who one day had this overwhelming spiritual experience. She knew God was present, and she felt God calling her to do something new, and scary, and hard. But she felt God so clearly that day that she could not deny it. It is the sort of spiritual experience most of us want. The moment of clarity. The clear marching orders. It is like Thomas getting to touch Jesus' hand.

The young woman did go out, and for the next 50 years she did amazing things. But inside she doubted. She wrestled with faith. She had what Christian writers for centuries have called a "dark night of the soul". Sometimes she even questioned the existence of God. Her lack of faith bothered her.

The other disciples may have called her, "Doubting Theresa". But you and I know her as Mother Theresa, the woman who was made a saint by the Roman Catholic Church. I used to see pictures of her and think, she must be so holy. So full of faith. She must be so certain of what she is doing. But that wasn't always the case. She was like us. And she was like Thomas.

She wrote: "I feel just that terrible pain of loss, of God not wanting me, of God not being God, of God not really existing."<sup>1</sup> And in another personal letter, she struggled with accepting the love of Jesus: "Jesus has a very special love for you. As for me, the silence and the emptiness is so great that I look and do not see, listen and do not hear."<sup>2</sup>

The fact is, doubt is part of the normal Christian life for many known and unknown saints. If you think about it, the whole idea of faith presupposes doubt. If we know everything, we don't need to have faith in anything. Doubt keeps our faith honest and our prayers real. Doubt gives us some epistemological humility. In other words, we need to accept the truth that no one, I mean no one, can have absolute

certainty this side of heaven. Yes, Mother Teresa doubted. She is one of a long line of doubters. It should give us courage to admit our own doubts to ourselves, to others, and especially to God.

Doubt and fear are bound to come upon all of us and we do well to face these feelings like the little boy in church and like Thomas, both of whom were in good and safe places to question and then to see and learn. As a family of Christians, together we can encounter the risen Christ, patiently and lovingly leading us into truth, just as he led Thomas.

If we are willing to work through our fear and our doubts, we will find the other side of today's Gospel that teaches us also about faith. If we are honest in our relationships with one another, we can experience mutual support in learning to believe what we cannot easily see. We can recognise the power of the Holy Spirit at work among us, providing new possibilities that can move us beyond doubt and fear. We will discover that through the power of God those things that we thought impossible can become reality.

Dreams can be fulfilled, forgiveness offered, obstacles overcome, pain relieved, hunger fed, spiritual longings relieved, good brought from evil and love experienced in all the Easter glory of the risen Christ.

For all of us, Easter means moving from doubt to faith - from fear to joy - from death to life. One of the greatest strengths we have as Christians, is a personal relationship with God. The closer our relationship with God the more our doubts are dispelled. We all go through periods of doubt for one reason or another in our walk with God. But rather than hide from them or deny them we should bring them to God.

The love Christ demonstrated to Thomas and above all by his death for us speaks of love and nurture through out times of doubt. God accepts each one of us as we are and where we are, doubt is not a barrier to God's love.