

Homily for the Second Sunday of Easter

(on the occasion of the baptism of John Thomas)

Acts 2:42-47

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

Ah, the annual appearance of doubting Thomas...

There was a time, not too long ago,
when people confessed doubt as a sin:
an era of a commonly accepted “universe of truth”
to which all were expected to pledge their faith.
So accepted was this universe of truth that those who rejected it
were considered heretics.
So undoubtedly valid was this universe esteemed
that one who doubted the indubitable could be judged guilty of sin.
In our own times there is a commonly accepted “universe of doubt”
in which virtually no proposition is accepted as objectively true
and all truths claiming that name are, by virtue of the claim,
considered suspect and not to be trusted.

If the former era was an Age of Faith,
ours is an Age of Doubt.

Doubting Thomas had, at least, the openness to say,
“I won’t believe *until... until* I see the nail marks in his hands,
until I put my hand into the wound in his side.”

Thomas was not without faith --
he just wanted a little proof.

A contemporary Thomas, however, seeks no proof
for he denies that any objective proof could be offered
and so he simply doubts –and dismisses – the possibility
of rising from the dead.

We can easily miss that such is the cultural matrix in which we live,
oblivious to the obvious.

(Remember: you can be sure that whoever discovered water --
it wasn’t a fish.)

We swim in the culture of doubt.

We breathe its air.

The culture of doubt distorts our world view:
it deconstructs our understanding of truth;
redefines the boundaries of morality;
warps our sense of justice;
disguises our narcissism as the appropriation of self-worth;
and twists our dreams of peace into hopeless nightmares.

Theologian Paul Tillich says that doubt is not the opposite of faith, but rather an element of it.

Doubt, indeed, can lead us to faith or restore us to it when faith is lost. But when doubt *consumes* faith and spits it out as so much garbage, we are left miserably disconnected from God, painfully estranged from love, and achingly cut off from hope.

As Buddhist wisdom teaches:
“There is nothing more dreadful than the habit of doubt. Doubt separates people. It is a poison that disintegrates friendships... It is a thorn that wounds; it is a sword that kills.”
(Gautama Siddharta)

Our culture of doubt clouds our understanding of God and shrouds our trust in the church. If we give ourselves over to our doubts we will lose our faith in God and tear apart the body of Christ, the church. Doubt can be a deadly worm insinuating itself in our experience and relationships until it saps us of all the beauty of what is truly human. Or doubt can be like a grain of sand in an oyster, an irritant that gives rise, finally, to a beautiful pearl of great price – faith.

It would be dishonest to artificially dismiss our doubts. Rather, what we need is to trust that there is something greater, brighter, more pure, true, just, loving and timeless than our doubts. “Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen. By faith we understand that all is ordered by the word of God, that what is visible came into being through the invisible.”
(Hebrews 11:1, 3)

When doubting Thomas got his proof, he did not say, “Alright. I believe you’re alive.” Such a response would have been little more than a skeptic’s grudging admission to the facts. Rather, doubting Thomas’ response was one of faith: “My Lord and my God!”

Pray with me that we who swim in a sea of doubt may not drown in its deadly waters but rather rise up out of them,

as Christ rose from the grave,
as John Thomas will rise from the waters of this font,
to a life of love, hope and faith.

Fr. Fleming