

“The Courage To Doubt”

In the name of our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace.

The story of Thomas, who is the focus of our gospel reading, for this the first Sunday after Easter, as it always is, has strapped that disciple with the label, “Doubting Thomas.” I’ve often thought that maybe he should be called “Thomas the Brave” because he was the only disciple who proposed going up to Jerusalem to die with Jesus. He was also willing to ask a “stupid question, and that is another reason to call him “Thomas the Brave.”

We can imagine the pressures he must have been under from the other disciples during that week of waiting for Jesus to come again. They must have used all their best arguments to convince him that they had seen the risen Christ. It probably made them very uneasy to think that he would dare to challenge the Lord for proof. But Thomas still had this lingering question in his heart and had to find out for himself.

Thomas was struggling to find meaning in his hour of loss. Such doubts and questions of faith are exposed at the time of the death of our loved ones for all of us. It is the struggle of all the bereaved, of all who grieve the death of loved ones. After a grave side experience nothing is the same for both the living and the dead. The essential truths about life and death must be confronted. The deepest questions must be raised.

Friends, it is not a sin to doubt, though I know some people think it is. Doubts are stepping stones, not obstacles to true faith. There are times when we, too, are troubled with questions that need to be asked. Thomas was no different.

Thomas opts to search alone, yet it is in the bosom of his community, surrounded by his disciple friends, that the defining moment occurs. Thomas sees and teaches. It all makes sense now. His journey from unbelief to belief is complete. In his rising, Jesus still bears the scars of the exile’s pilgrimage. In his rising he continues to speak the language of human compassion of healing and love. “Peace be with you.”

Thomas has done us a great favour by showing us that it is all right to admit our doubts, to seek answers and reassurance. Though Jesus praises those who have not seen and still believe, he is not angry with Thomas and gives him the proof he needs.

There is a wonderful illustration of questioning and believing in Elie Wiesel’s memoir entitled “Night.” Wiesel, a winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, a number of years ago. He tells his story as a boy growing up in a Jewish ghetto in an Hungarian village in 1942. His father forbade him, since he was only twelve, to read the literature of Jewish mysticism and would not find him a teacher. But the boy found one himself in the local synagogue where he went each night to pray.

It was Moche, the humble servant, who cleaned the place, and on one occasion he said to Elie, “Why do you weep when you pray?” “He asked me as if he had known me for a long time,” Wiesel writes. “I don’t know why,” I answered, greatly disturbed.

The question had never entered my head. I wept because, because of something inside of me that felt the need for tears. That was all I know.

“Why do you pray?” he asked me, after a moment. “Why did I live?” “Why did I breathe?”

“I don’t know why,” I said, even more disturbed and ill at ease. “I don’t know why.”

After that day I saw him often. He explained to me that every question possessed a power that did not lie in the answer. "You will find the true answers, Elie, only within yourself."

"And why do you pray, Moche?" I asked him. He answered, "I pray to the God within me that he will give me the wisdom to ask the right question."

My brothers and sisters in Christ. Let me repeat what I said a few moments ago. It is not a sin to doubt. Doubts are stepping stones, not obstacles to true faith. There are times when we, too, just like Thomas, are troubled with questions that need to be asked. May the questions we ask and the answers we get, lead to enlightenment and peace of heart, just as they did for Thomas the Brave! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.