



## **“Doubt”**

A homily by the Very Reverend Michael R. Ruk

Sun., Apr. 28, 2019

Gospel this week: John 20:19-31

If you were with us on Good Friday, you recall the liturgy of Good Friday is unique. It's not your typical Sunday morning. It goes back to a very, very ancient time. And after we prayed through the passion of Christ, we get to a point where we call upon all the church to pray for the world. These prayers are called the universal prayers, because you're literally praying for the universe.

Every year when we get to this one section, after we've prayed for the church, and government leaders, and for the hungry and the homeless, we get to this one part, this one segment that really strikes me. It goes like this:

Let us pray for all who have not received the Gospel of Christ,  
For those who have never heard the word of salvation,  
For those who have lost their faith,  
For those hardened by sin or indifference,  
For the contemptuous and the scornful,  
For those who are enemies of the cross of Christ and persecutors of his disciples,  
For those who in the name of Christ have persecuted others,  
That God will open their hearts to the truth, and lead them to faith and obedience.

The second Sunday after Easter, every year, we get the same gospel; it's one of those rare occasions. It's always this gospel from John. The story of, as many of us probably know him, “Doubting Thomas.” But I think the story is a little bit more complicated than just throwing doubt upon someone or something.

It's the story of someone's faith journey. And this faith journey of Thomas reflects upon our own faith journey.

So many times, people come up to me – good people, with strong piety and strong devotion, people who are struggling to understand their place in God’s kingdom – they say to me, “You know, I don’t believe in the creed. I can’t say it. I literally have to cross my fingers and not say anything. And I feel like I can’t come to church anymore.”

Or, “I can’t believe in the resurrection. I have a hard time. I need to step away.”

Or, “I can’t deal with this idea of praying to God as father. It’s hard for me. It’s awkward. I need to pull away from the church.”

It goes on and on and on. And it actually happens more than you think it does. And quite honestly, as a priest, it really hurts me. I think, OK, is there something – maybe it’s my own ego – is it something that I’m not doing right? Am I not explaining something right? Am I making people feel alienated?

But it’s really a journey of faith that we all go on. It’s a struggle. And those struggles are holy struggles. They’re holy struggles, because these struggles in many ways are what Thomas went through. Thomas, we know from tradition, was the one who wanted to touch and see and know for certain that what Jesus was saying was true.

Most of us don’t have that luxury that Thomas had. We don’t have a physical Jesus to say to, “OK, give me the spiel here. What really is going on?” Thomas did. But for us here 2,000 years later, it’s a question of, Where does our faith take us?

Sometimes it’s a struggle. It’s a struggle of mind. It’s a struggle of heart. It’s a struggle of, How do we live as followers of Jesus when sometimes the teachings of Christ, the teachings of the Church, are hard pills to swallow.

And I want to say to you, that struggle is a holy struggle. It’s not a bad thing. It’s not a bad thing at all. It’s a good thing that you’re having planted in you that wrestling, that restless heart that wants to know more and go deeper and deeper.

Sometimes, for some of us, we get stuck up here [in our head]. We need to explain everything. We’re too rational. We need to know why, and how, and how this is possible. Versus moving 18 inches down, and moving into the heart.

I think that’s what, in the story, that sometimes we don’t catch. It’s that when Jesus is there, and Thomas reaches out, what does he do? He touches his heart. He touches his pierced side, the heart of Christ. And faith becomes a heart matter, not a head matter.

I know so many people who have Ph.D.s in theology or philosophy for whom literally things get stuck up here [in their head], and never make it down here [to their heart].

And I think that's really what Jesus is saying here to Thomas. It's that we somehow need to get out of our heads, out of trying to figure out the answers. Because we never will. We have to come to a conclusion that's based in the heart, that's based in faith.

In John's gospel, the climax of John's gospel is not the crucifixion. It's not even the resurrection. It's that one line that Thomas says, that we just heard: "My God and my All."

Everything is there. Everything is there. That's what the whole purpose of John's gospel is about: To have that faith that Thomas exclaims. That's the root of everything.

And I think that's the challenge that we need to take ourselves to. To go to a place of the heart and get out of our heads. Sometimes the creed, or the Our Father, or the doctrine of the trinity, or the resurrection, or the afterlife, or whatever your faith struggle is of the day, is just that: It's a faith struggle that requires us to go down deeper and deeper.

Thomas Aquinas, that great theologian of the Middle Ages, wrote books upon books upon books. But on his deathbed, he had a vision. He said that all his works were straw, and all his books should be set ablaze, because they were worthless if they didn't have the love of Christ in them.

Maybe we need to think about that, too. Sometimes these words, these doctrines, these dogmas, are human ways of understanding a mystery. But if they don't have the love of Christ in them, the heart of Christ, they're just straw.