

Second Sunday of Easter
April 23, 2017
St. John 20:26-31
Faith without Sight, is Faith on the Word of God
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Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

The weeks go swiftly by. It already has been seven days since we celebrated our Savior's resurrection from death and the tomb. This is the same period of time between Jesus' two appearances to his gathered disciples in today's gospel lesson.

What did Jesus do over the seven days following his appearance on Easter night? We don't know. We do not know what the disciples did either. One thing we know is when the eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection told Thomas they had seen the Lord, the apostle did not believe them. For Thomas, seeing was believing. Little did he know he would bear the moniker, "Doubting Thomas" to this day.

We, of course, have not seen Jesus' glorified body either. We do not doubt the reality. On Easter we heard Peter's words, "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with and inexpressible and glorious joy." [1 Pt 3:8]

Thomas believed only after he saw Jesus a week later. We believe on the basis of God's Word. The latter is what our risen Savior commends. **Faith without Sight, is Faith on the Word of God.** Jesus granted his disciples an early visitation. Jesus shows such a sight is not the basis for faith.

For whatever reason, the apostle Thomas was not present when Jesus granted his disciples an early visitation on Easter night. There is nothing to indicate our Lord had any contact with the disciples until the next Sunday. In his perfect knowledge, Jesus knew what Thomas had said about not believing unless he literally thrust his hands into Jesus' wounds.

Jesus' invitation for Thomas to do just that as Jesus stood in their midst the next Sunday was putting Thomas' very words back on him. Whether or not Thomas actually touched Jesus has been a debate among Christian intellectuals for centuries. Whether he did or not, Thomas' faith was based on the fact that he had seen Jesus with his eyes. Our Lord did not condemn Thomas for that faith but simply stated, "Because you have seen me you have believed."

Faith based on sight is not really faith at all. Faith is not built on something we can see or have seen. The writer to the Hebrews builds that truth when he wrote in chapter 11:1, "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and the assurance of what we do not see." We cannot see God. We cannot see Jesus' cross and empty tomb. We cannot see Jesus' glorified body with the nail and spear wounds. We cannot see the good in pain and suffering. We cannot see the many mansions reserved for us in heaven.

Genuine faith is believing in those things we have not seen with our eyes. Faith is trusting the opposite of how things might appear to our eyes. Does this mean our faith in Christ's resurrection and life have no basis? Are we to consider the arguments of those who deny any reality unless they can see it, or prove it? Not at all. Faith without sight, is faith on the Word of God.

Jesus defined the faith in his resurrection and all of God's realities our Lord seeks. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." The apostle John then wrote how such a thing is possible. It is possible because John and the other apostles have written down their eyewitness

accounts through which the Holy Spirit works. Paul wrote to the Romans, “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

Jesus did too many miracles as signs of his person and work for all of them to be recorded in Holy Scripture. John wrote essentially the same thing as Paul in words we sing in our liturgy, about what was written down. “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Here we find the answer to why the Bible was written. It is not a rule book. It is not the script of some great morality play. It is not a road map for self-help or a plan to make the world a better place to live. These words are written so that we believe that Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen again, is the Messiah, the Christ, in whom we have the forgiveness of all our sins and the assurance of eternal life in heaven.

“There is no better teacher than the Holy Spirit and no better text than God’s Word,” to quote Linus in a cute comic. While an uninspired source, the young man is absolutely right. Our faith rests on the Word of God because we trust its clarity and veracity and that it cannot be broken, i.e. changed. We do not have to thrust our finger into Jesus’ nail wounds, or put our hand into his side in order to believe. We have the certain words of Holy Scripture as the sure foundation for our faith in Jesus’ resurrection and life which are our resurrection and life.

I rather like to think of the apostle Thomas not as doubting but believing. Was his faith properly based when he finally admitted the reality of Jesus standing in front of him, “My Lord, and my God?” No, but Jesus set him on the right path. His Lord and his God turned Thomas’ faith away from his sight to the Word of God.

Please, heed your Savior’s imperative as well. Do not be unbelieving, but believing. Then, be blessed even as you have not seen but believe. Amen. <SDG>