

Second Sunday of Easter - C

I have to admit, there's something about Thomas's attitude in today's Gospel that resonates deeply with me.

I like to think of myself as someone who can detect a con and avoid being caught up in it, and pride myself on being a sober judge of character.

"Just because someone says something is true, doesn't make it so." I'm sure my mother told me that any number of times as I was growing up, and the logic of that statement always seemed unassailable to me.

I've bought into that way of approaching the world. No snake oil salesmen for me!

So, when Thomas is skeptical about the news that Jesus has been raised from the dead, I can hardly fault him. After all, nothing like that had ever happened before. True, a number of his fellow disciples had given witness to it, but still, better to play hard to convince than to be taken for a fool.

The problem with that approach becomes apparent as the story unfolds. First of all, it is true that Jesus has been raised from the dead. If Jesus had not returned to the upper room Thomas would simply have missed out on the pivotal event of the entire human history.

If Jesus had not returned to the upper room, the story we would be telling on

this second Sunday of Easter would have to portray Thomas as the biggest fool of all—the one who had been let in on the momentous event only to stand on a pride-based principle of believing only what can be seen and touched and thus miss it all.

Would Thomas have received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost if he had persisted in his unbelief? I have reason to think he would not have.

There's another issue lurking in the background of this resurrection story: Thomas says he will not believe unless he can "see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side."

Then, Jesus appears a second time, goes directly to Thomas, and says to him, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe."

There's no actual evidence that Thomas did so. The Gospel simply says, "Thomas answered and said to him, 'My Lord and My God!'"

The encounter with the risen Lord is so profound that Thomas forgets his conditions and has the ground on which he thinks to stand—unbelief for the sake of certainty—removed from him.

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So it is with the encounter with God—something we can easily forget. The Old Testament tradition was a lot firmer in its presentation that to fall into the hands of the living God meant fear and trembling for the person involved.

In being confronted with the risen Jesus Thomas has no room for studious investigation. He is exposed to the very quick for all the lack he carries with him—all the unbelief, all the refusal to trust in the promises of God.

Jesus says to him and to us, that's no way to live. Being hard to convince actually goes against what God is trying to accomplish.

We can imagine particularly in our present day how dangerous such attitudes can be.

At the risk of alienating some, perhaps many of you, I have to draw the parallel between Thomas's attitude and the "wait and see" approach many want to take when comes to the issue of climate change.

Some would want to put their faith in the one scientist who denies that human activity has anything to do with it, while ignoring the scientific consensus and the continued outpouring of evidence to the contrary.

What could be behind that other than a desire to cling to the status quo and avoid the fundamental changes in lifestyle entailed in accepting the evidence as true?

Many would hold to the belief that this is not a religious issue, even though the Pope has clearly outlined the church's teaching that care for our common home is the overriding moral imperative of our time.

No one wants to be made a fool, but each of us is called upon to search our motivations to see whether reluctance to believe is actually a mask for a self-serving attitude that is resistant to conversion.

Even though my own response is much too lukewarm to be made into an example, I am firm in my belief that allowing the Holy Spirit to move in my life will mean taking these issues more seriously.

I hear Jesus saying to me in the here and now, "Do not be unbelieving, but believe."

For those who come after us, and who will have to deal more profoundly with the consequences of our refusal to believe, the one blessing we can offer them is to begin today to take the promptings of the Spirit seriously, and recognize that they are not limited to our own personal call to holiness, but addressed to us all together as well.

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We must not fail them. We must not be like Thomas and confronted with the truth, only to realize that we had missed the original invitation to believe.