

Sermon for Easter 2A
Sunday, April 23, 2017
“Skeptical Thomas”

Text: John 20:19-31

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The 2nd Sunday of Easter goes by a couple names. It's called “Low Sunday” because of the relatively low attendance compared to last Sunday when we enjoyed record high attendance. It is also known as “Doubting Thomas Sunday,” because the lectionary reading every year retells the post-Resurrection event when Jesus appeared to his disciples twice, first in the evening on the day of the Resurrection, and again a week later when he addressed the questions and concerns of Thomas. I often say, when I preach on this text, that Thomas gets a bad rap, because we have labeled Thomas as a doubter, because he said, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” I often say that although he doubted at first, he was the first to proclaim him as both Lord and God. He recognized Jesus as the second person of the Trinity. But the more I think about it, I'm not so sure Thomas was a doubter at all. I was discussing this with a number of you at mass this past Friday, and the point was raised that Thomas was really more of a skeptic—you know, the kind of person whose outlook on life is that the glass is half-empty, rather than half-full. If you remember from two weeks back, when Jesus wanted to go to Bethany in order to raise Lazarus from the dead, Thomas begrudgingly said that they would be going there at their own risk to die with Jesus. Thomas was one of those folks who always looked for the dark part of the cloud with the silver lining. But, you see, I'm finding Thomas a lot more compelling an individual. I'm finding Thomas more compelling, because he is really a representation of us. Thomas is the person we can really relate to.

Thomas was a skeptic. We, too, are skeptics. We naturally have doubts; we often question about how things can be. And how could we *not* be? We are brought up in a world that asks questions. We want evidence for everything. The search for evidence affects us every day in some way in our life. And that's not a bad thing. We need to ask questions and test the boundaries of the way things seem to be vs. the way things are. We wouldn't be human if we didn't wonder and ask why

or how. Thomas dared to ask the question that probably so many of the other disciples were too afraid to ask. We know they were afraid, because they locked themselves in a room in a house. According to John's account, Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the disciple whom Jesus loved (we presume that to be John himself) saw the empty tomb. But, did you ever wonder what the other disciples thought when they heard Mary Magdalene say, "I have seen the Lord!"? They probably wanted some kind of proof too; they wanted hard evidence and not just hearsay. It was Thomas who named it, named their disbelief at the incredible, and said, "I need to see for myself." And Jesus came through by appearing to them twice—the second time so Thomas could also believe.

I'm not so sure I would believe if I hadn't had doubt on occasion or longed for evidence for myself. I think we are all in that situation. We're all Thomases at one time or another. One of the challenges I find both as a longtime practicing Christian and as a proclaimer of the Word, is trying to talk to people who don't believe in God or Christ, or who don't think that church is important. I can talk somebody else until I'm blue in the face, but they're not really going to believe, they're not even going to get what I'm talking about until they actually experience God in Christ for themselves. And see, there's the hook. I believe, because I have had a personal encounter with God and the risen Christ. That's why I'm here. I imagine that we all believe, because we have had a personal encounter with God and the risen Christ in some profound way. I've spent years studying biology, physiology, anatomy, chemistry, and such, and I frequently watch stuff on TV or read on the internet about the wonders of the universe. I can't tell you how many times God's presence has been blatantly obvious to me in all that. I've had low points in my life. I've had moments when the thought has crossed my mind, "Is God gonna come through this time?" or "Where is God in this?" I've seen tragedy, misery, despair in my life and in the world, but somehow God's presence shines forth in the resilience, endurance, and ability of people to overcome tragedy, survive, and move on. I've had my skeptical, Thomas moments on occasion, but then something miraculously fell into place. When I saw one door close, another door I wasn't expecting opened up. When things didn't go the way I wanted them to or a situation didn't turn out like I expected, I eventually discovered how much better off I was because what I wanted didn't happen. But, every time I expected God to

be there for me, and even moreso when I wasn't really sure if he was there, God always showed up. Whether we expect him to or not, God always shows up. No, we can't see his wounds or touch his side, like Thomas did, but I suspect that each and every one of you, if you think hard enough over your life, can find at least one moment when God just showed up. That's when you saw his wounds and touched his side. You've been Thomas, too!

We need to be a skeptic like Thomas, sometimes, in order to strengthen our faith, otherwise, we'd be blind followers. We get to touch and taste the risen Christ physically in the sacrament of his Body and Blood at the Eucharist, but if we hadn't had have some personal encounter with him in some way, it would mean nothing to us. In fact none of what we do in here, the liturgy, the ritual, the pretty things we see, the pretty language we hear, the pretty songs we sing, none of it would mean anything if we had not, at some point, had a personal encounter with God and the risen Christ. Thomas needed to see and touch the wounds of Jesus in order to believe. When was it for you? When have you been a skeptic, like Thomas? How did God then break into your life and come in your midst to dispel your doubt? Are you still waiting? What is it that compels you to say, "My Lord and my God!" when the Blessed Sacrament is held up high before you during the Eucharistic Prayer? What has moved you to exclaim the Easter message, "I have seen the Lord!"? Amen.