

Sunday: Easter II, Cycle B, 4.12.15
 Scripture: Acts 4:32-35/Jn 5:1-6/Jn 20:19-31

**BLESSED ASSURANCE:
 JESUS IS HERE!**

Several weeks throughout the Easter Season we will depart from the Gospel of Mark and listen to passages from the Gospel of John. The core thread of John's gospel is simply -- *faith*. In his famous prologue, St. John writes that "all who accepted Jesus and believed in him were empowered to become children of God." Every one of the next nineteen chapters after that is about faith: its importance, its loss and all the ways people came to belief in Jesus. Finally, at the end, Jesus says to Thomas and to us: "Blessed are they who have not seen yet have believed." John concludes by writing that all that he wrote is to help us to believe.

The sight of Jesus in visions may or may not save us. Faith and trust in Him always do! Faith is not just belief about Jesus but trust in Him as well. When someone makes investment decisions they examine a broker's words and track record in order to make a judgment that's reliable. They will then invest their money based on his word. In Jesus, we are making an investment of our soul and our eternal future.

This second Sunday of Easter used to be called the "Sunday of Depositing the Albs." It was the Sunday when the newly baptized adults took off their white baptismal garments from Easter and went back to ordinary street clothes. The entire week after Easter was considered one long Easter Sunday. For many, this Sunday is a time to go back to routine. The splendor and emotion of Easter Sunday are past and it's business as usual. But the Easter Season invites us to widen our scope of faith. It invites us to see how the Risen Lord uses the rituals and elements of the sacraments, the written and the preached Word and the life

of the Church to speak to us, to embrace us, to challenge us, and to save us. To be able to see Christ in all these places is to open our eyes to the thrilling, dynamic, invisible but real presence of the Risen Lord with us today.

At every Baptism, Christ is calling a new disciple. At every Confirmation – as forty of our parish youth will soon celebrate, Christ is strengthening one of his own for a specific mission in life. At every Eucharist, as we'll share with over a hundred of our children in a couple weeks at their First Communion, Christ is with us as food for the journey of life. At every Confession, he is forgiving sin and equipping each penitent with grace to grow in love and fidelity. At every Marriage, Christ is creating a bond between two people as permanent as that between Himself and His Church. At every Anointing of the Sick, Christ is present to bring comfort, dignity and grace to the hospitalized or homebound, those who are weak in body and spirit. To see Christ in all these places with the eyes of faith is like going from black and white to Technicolor, from simple screen to cinemascope, from analog to high density digital television.

This incident with Thomas calls us to enter into a deeper relationship with the Risen Christ as we move beyond a quest for visions to the inward experience of his grace. This meeting between Jesus and Thomas is our invitation into the majestic Easter faith that has sustained the Church and her people for centuries, because this gospel was not written for the apostles but for us. The pledge and promise of the Risen Jesus to us is that through faith we too will experience the same saving relationship with Christ that the apostles did. This Sunday we can look beyond the Easter crowds and the Easter outfits into Easter life. It is a chance to embrace a deeper Easter faith which is a trust in Jesus and a trust in the places where

He is always present -- in His Church, His gospel teaching and His sacraments.

I think there are two things that can keep us from a deeper faith – perhaps they were two things that caused Thomas to falter in his belief. The first is ‘ego.’ When I am too filled with “me,” there isn’t much room available for anyone or anything else. All the great religious traditions of the world, including our Catholic mystical tradition, begin with trying to understand the ego – the individuality, the uniqueness of each person, and then, once understood, to allow the ego to take its proper place. If my ego is the center of my universe, it leaves no place for God to act or direct the core of being. If all my energies are spent trying to fulfill the needs of my ego, I become a slave even without my realizing it. As one businessman wrote: *“Every now and again I have to pull my ego back in line; in fact it happens quite a lot. It's difficult to get the balance between trying to make money for the future and trying to be spiritual.”* So while we appreciate the wonderful gift to the world each of us is, we also need to appreciate how vast is the universe that God created – a universe in which God is the center and the turning point.

The second hurdle or obstacle to faith is the ‘intellect.’ In saying that, I’m not suggesting that we should be anti-intellectual. That’s the problem with fundamentalism, which impacts too many religious traditions, including our own; fundamentalism expects you to check your brains at the door of the Church. That’s not a Catholic position. We know our intellect is a great gift from God to be used wisely. Faith and reason are more than compatible, they’re mutually necessary. Besides that, you and I come from families and a society that prizes education and learning. If we collected all the university degrees that people in this room have, it would make an impressive portfolio. By saying the intellect

can be problematic or a hindrance to our faith, I’m suggesting that the intellect is not all there is to our inner life and the life of our mind. Our intellectual self needs to be balanced by our emotions, for they too are necessary for a deep faith; by the spiritual and supernatural realities which are too easily dismissed and even disdained in our secular world, even by our dreams which can be means for divine communication. Thomas wanted proof – he wanted to satisfy his need for intellectual, rational verification. *“Not until I put my finger in his side will I believe.”* He got his proof; his intellectual curiosity was appeased. But he and believers for all time learned a lesson that would endure forever: *“Blessed are those who have not seen, who relied not solely on their intellect, yet have believed.”*



So we begin this extended Easter season in the beautiful company of John’s gospel – a testimony to the significance, the challenge and joy of faith. That faith comes to birth in humble hearts who can let go of our own ego long enough to be touched by God. It flourishes in the lives of believers who allow God to use every channel of grace to grasp us – our minds and hearts, our intellect and our emotions. It is celebrated in a community whose experience of Church – our prayer and our sacraments – are assured places where the Risen Lord can and will always be found.