

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Apr 12th 2015

During this Easter season the notion of paradox has been in my thoughts and prayers. A paradox contradicts itself while at the same time is true. Paradox can be seen as deceitful or confusing, but I appreciate the dynamism of paradox. A dear friend of mine has just written a book about forms of paradox which are present in conflict situations. And when I was forming a non-profit agency to work with families and children in crisis, the ability to grapple with paradox of responding to families with compassion while requiring accountability was an essential trait for a successful colleague.

This appreciation of paradox is present in my prayer. During Lent and Easter I have been experiencing joy and pain with Jesus. I can be flooded by gratitude for the beauty of spring and then feel depleted by the busyness of this time of year. The steadfast love of God will be so present to me and then I will have a dry, empty session of prayer. These tensions can be powerful when I stay with them rather than answer them away.

In today's gospel the story of Thomas is a powerful example of paradox. Thomas is a man with deep faith in Jesus, yet he struggles to believe that Jesus has risen. Thomas embodies the paradox of faith and doubt. We often say seeing is believing but perhaps seeing is simply seeing. Jesus says to Thomas, "Have you come to believe in me because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

We are so familiar with this story of Thomas and he is often referred to as "Doubting Thomas." As I pray with today's Gospel my admiration for Thomas abounds. He has always helped me in my moments of doubt. And today I feel respect for the courage he had when he decided to speak up about his doubt. It is very difficult to be a lone voice in a group. Thomas was true to himself and his doubt. He was living with the tension of paradox. While Thomas was confident of his love for Jesus and still reeling from his grief about the death of Jesus, he was unsure of his capacity to believe that Jesus had risen. That does not mean he did not want to believe, he was simply struggling to do so. As the only member of the group who had not seen Jesus appear in the locked Upper Room, Thomas asked the tough questions. Perhaps we could start to refer to him as "Courageous Thomas."

As I appreciate the courage of Thomas and the reassuring love of Jesus I ask myself these paradoxical questions: How many times do I ask God for a sign? What kind of proof of God's love am I unknowingly looking for in my life? How can I embrace the paradox of my faith and allow my doubt to deepen my belief in God? When can I support someone who wants to speak about a difficult matter?

