

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Jul 3rd 2015

“We have seen the Lord!”

There are many things in life we have to “take on faith” but I don’t think our faith should be one of them! Our faith needs to engage our heads and our hearts; a healthy skepticism will help us grow in an understanding of our faith but we also need experience. Praying with today’s readings has given me an opportunity to explore various dimensions of faith and its relation to our experience of Christian community.

One definition of “faith” is “belief” – a strong conviction in something, say a body of religious doctrines, when evidence or “proof” is lacking. Or, a conviction that one’s business plan will succeed, in spite of a lack of previous success. Another aspect of faith is “trust” – because someone has been trustworthy – truthful and dependable – we come to have faith in them. “I have faith in what you tell me because I have a relationship with you, one in which you have been consistently honest with me.”

Poor Thomas. I think he has been given a bum rap. He has been nicknamed “Doubting Thomas” because, as described in today’s Gospel reading, he did not believe that Jesus had appeared to the other disciples as they claimed. He wanted evidence and “proof” - “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into his side, I will not believe.” As a high school senior in a Catholic high school taking a course on Christian Existentialism, I recall thinking about the origins of the universe and the religious doctrine I had been taught and suddenly wondering, “Who made up all this stuff!?”

And there began my search for a personal relationship with Jesus. (Shift to second definition). I began to have deeper conversations with those I trusted. And soon “came to believe” because of my own experience. I began to see, hear, and feel the presence of Christ in my life. I experienced him talking to me, listening to me, encouraging me and challenging me. Evidence no longer mattered because there was relationship.

There are many times in our lives where we may have to rely on others – i.e. trust in their belief - times of great sorrow and loss, misfortune and disaster and many other types of hardship. That is my experience of Christian community, and it is what gets us through. But if that is our only experience of the risen Christ – through the experience of others – we are not living our faith fully. What do we have to share with others? Who will find us trustworthy when they are seeking or struggling? The first reading speaks of this community: “you are no longer strangers...in him you are also being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. It is very often our trust in the faith of others that leads to our growing faith, but it isn’t meant to replace it.

Might Jesus have been chastising Thomas not so much for seeking evidence, but because his trust in his fellow disciples was shaky? Something to think about.

National surveys continue to remind us that membership in Christian religions is falling. Perhaps that is not so much an indicator of a generation that seeks “evidence” and “proof” in order to “believe,” but rather a reflection of declining numbers of people who have their own experience of faith to share with others. And, of course, a lack of trust in religious institutions that in the past had been honest and dependable in the life of our families. Something else to think and pray about.

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