

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, May 28th 2016

I don't recall ever reading or hearing of the book of Jude before I saw the readings for today. As a result I spent a bit of time trying to place the epistle in context and to understand as best I could its origins. I'm not sure I know any more than when I started, except perhaps that it is one of the shortest books in the bible and was written in the latter part of the first century of the CE.

Setting aside my feeble attempts at biblical origin studies, what called to me for reflection from the epistle was the second line of the excerpt presented – “Build yourselves up in your most holy faith.” A few weeks ago in the Sunday mass readings we encountered Thomas, who doubted the resurrection, whose faith was limited to his sensory perceptions. Now we encounter the author of this epistle, who might have been one of the 12 apostles, but who most certainly was someone who knew someone who traveled with Jesus.

What is faith? This has many times been a more troubling virtue to understand and to mold in my own life than have been the other two, hope and love/charity. I can easily feel hope and love, but faith requires a different response. Perhaps there is more of the doubting Thomas in me than I care to admit (and he was not my patron saint, it was Aquinas!). It is difficult to accept some things “on faith alone.” And human perceptions are not reliable (just consider juries in criminal cases) and so someone telling me X is true is not always comforting.

Perhaps if the person who is telling us something has proven to be reliable in the past, our faith in the truth of what she says can be stronger. On the other hand, if he has been unreliable in the past, it might weaken our faith. And certainly if someone has acted consistently (and admirably) with what they say, we can have stronger faith in the veracity of their statements.

If we place ourselves in the period following Jesus' resurrection, we would see people who knew Him, who believed (had faith) that he rose from the dead. They either actually saw Him in resurrected glory or knew someone who had. But the truth of their faith for me is their actions. Not only did they live their lives as He called them to do, but they refused to deny His resurrection even in the face of martyrdom. Their faith led to actions consistent with the truth as it was revealed to them. In each mass we celebrate them when we recite the mysteries of our faith – Christ's death, resurrection, return.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said “Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.” St. Augustine said “Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.” And Jesus told Thomas that we who have not seen and still believe are blessed indeed.

So, whether Jude was written by the disciple who traveled with Jesus, or by a second generation believer who knew someone who had been a companion of Christ while in His ministry, really doesn't matter at this point. The author knew those who manifested their faith in the resurrection by their actions of adhering to their beliefs, even in the face of violent and gruesome death. Their faith was the foundation upon which all else in Christianity has been based. That seems pretty reliable to me. And it helps me in my own faith journey.

And so my prayer today is for the grace to more fully understand the mystery that is faith, and thus to

deepen my own faith foundation.

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