

Homily 2nd Sunday of Easter – Year A 20th April 2017

In today's gospel we confront the great paradox of St Thomas; a man of great faith and yet a man of great doubt, doubting Thomas. Thomas a disciple, a follower of Jesus, one of the twelve, a man who was immersed in the teachings of Jesus, who saw the miracles yet could not believe Jesus had risen from the dead on Easter Sunday. Thomas a man who when confronted with the stark reality of the risen Jesus says in great humility: "My Lord and my God".

In the practice of Zen Buddhism it is said that "Great faith demands great doubt." The normal western understanding of faith and doubt is that they are opposites, opposing forces. If somebody doubts some aspect of a belief then we doubt their faith. If we had been a witness when Jesus appeared among the disciples for the first time we would probably have doubted Thomas' faith. We normally see doubts destroying faith; doubts tear at the fabric of our faith. Conversely as doubt diminishes faith increases. But, what if this doubt faith conflict is a product of my ego my ego that part of me that knows the truth and that's

that. My ego that part of me that says if only everybody else shared my values the world would be a better place. My ego, that has trouble believing that Jesus died for all of humankind; surely there were exceptions; what about the person who shot the police in Paris or the person who committed some other heinous crime.

See when I own my doubts and my faith, my false self my ego is threatened because it no longer has all the answers. You see when Jesus encountered Thomas for the first time; Jesus did not rebuke Thomas for not believing He had risen. Jesus simply revealed Himself and Thomas' doubts were swept away before the ultimate truth of the risen Jesus. The key for me to understanding the encounter between Jesus and Thomas is humility. Thomas expresses great humility saying "My Lord and my God" and Jesus humbly accepts Thomas in all his human brokenness. Jesus even after His death and resurrection is still teaching His disciples, He is still teaching by example still leading from the front. If I was Jesus I probably would have been angered by Thomas' doubts, here's a man I carefully selected, spent three years teaching and he fails to believe in my resurrection, he fails to believe his

closest companions, this guy is a waste of space. But, what does Jesus say: It's okay Thomas it would have been better if you believed without seeing me but it's okay I love you in your unbelief. In His encounter with Thomas, Jesus is teaching us that we will have doubts but those doubts will be resolved.

Doubt and belief are not black and white it's my ego, my need to have all the answers that forces me into that uncertainty. I have to accept there is another way to embrace both doubt and belief to hold them in tension. In our faith we see this tension in lots of ways. Death leading to new life is one that springs to mind in this Easter season. We have to die with Jesus in our Baptism in order to be reborn with Him in eternal life. The idea that death leads to life would be seen as lunacy by some, but we never the less hold that tension. In fact most of the things that you and I profess in our Creeds, the very things that make us Catholic, are held in some tension between our faith and our experience. If I think of my faith not in terms of a strict set of beliefs but more in terms of the essential things that make me who I am in the eyes of God, that part of me that reflects the image of God. My faith is then that part of me that gives me hope

despite of my brokenness, that gives me courage in great adversity. My faith is rooted in me so deeply that to deny my faith would be to deny the very essence of whom I am. For me faith is like my marriage my wife is part of the fabric of who I am. As some of you might know my wife Kaye is not a catholic and when I was studying to become a deacon somebody said to me what if you can't be ordained because Kaye is not catholic. I was astounded and replied that would be like saying I can't be ordained because I'm too tall. Kaye is who I am, the face and the smile. For me doubts come they challenge me, I doubt myself, I doubt my vocation, one of my constant doubts is summed up by the word "why". Why is this person dying? Why is this happening to xyz? Why am I so powerless? If I let these doubts wash over me they become the source of intense self-questioning. A self-questioning that I find resonates through the Psalms the very prayers of Jesus. The realisation that Jesus, the Son of God, must in His humanity have experienced these same doubts gives me great courage, the courage I need to carry on, the courage I need to embrace my doubts. If I embrace my doubts prayerfully and place them before God, my doubts will

not eat away at my soul like some spiritual acid, my doubts will in fact like Thomas' doubts become the bedrock of my faith. To paraphrase, American author and preacher Edward Everett Hale: "I cannot have all the answers but I can have some and what I do have I have with the grace of God"