

## Faith and Doubts

In the twentieth chapter of the Gospel according to John, we see four different encounters with the risen Christ. We are told that early that first Easter morning, Mary went to the tomb. When she found it empty, she runs back to tell the disciples, who are hiding in fear. Peter and "the other disciple," probably John himself, race out to the tomb. John looks into the tomb and "believes." That is all we know; he looks in and believes. Everything else is left to our imagination. After John and Peter return to town, Mary remains. A man who she assumes is the gardener, appears. She recognizes him as Jesus when he calls her name. Later that same day, all of the remaining disciples except Thomas are again hiding together. They are still afraid, even though John and Peter have returned to them and John now believes. Jesus comes to them and they rejoice. Then, finally, there is Thomas. He had gone out when Jesus came to the others. Perhaps he wanted to be alone in his grief. In any case, he was separated from the rest of the community when Jesus comes to them. So when he returns and the others tell him what has happened, he does not believe them. In a very human reaction, Thomas responds that he will believe that Christ has risen when he can see him and hear him and touch him.

Looking at these stories from another view, all these people had doubts. Jesus had said that he would die and rise from the dead, but, when he was crucified, his disciples lost faith. Doubts are normal. They are part of the faith journey. God works through our doubts to strengthen our faith. It needs to be noted that these doubts are best met and resolved in community, in the church. It is there that answers are best found.

The stories of John, Mary, Thomas, and the other disciples give us examples of four different ways God gives us to confront our doubts and increase our faith. Like John, God gives some an "empty tomb" in which to look and "believe." It might be the cross or the church building or some other tangible reminder that Christ has risen and is Lord. To others, like Mary, Christ calls by name. Perhaps this happens through prayer or through some other way. And, like sheep, we recognize his voice and follow him. To many, Jesus comes to us in community. Perhaps it is in church through the Sacraments or the preaching or the hearing

of the Scripture. Finally, many of us at one time or another are like Thomas and have very specific doubts. Christ can meet these very special needs directly. Through all these different means, God through Christ works to resolve our doubts and increase our faith.

Easter is much more than just a day. It is a season. Just as Lent was a season of self examination and repentance, Easter is a season of celebration and joy. Easter is the season of looking at the empty tomb, meeting the risen Lord, and growing in faith.

"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. but these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."

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