

## FROM DOUBT TO FAITH

Habakkuk 2. 1-4  
Ephesians 2. 19-22  
John 20. 24-29

I speak in the name of † the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Poor Thomas! Of all of our Lord's disciples, he is the only one to have emerged with a double nickname after two thousand years of history. 'Doubting Thomas', he is called. We don't commonly hear references to 'Impulsive Simon' or to 'Traitor Judas' or to 'Loving John'; but we do hear of 'Doubting Thomas'. St Thomas's greatest claim to fame, so it seems, is that he was the disciple who doubted Jesus.

Before we get to Thomas' story in chapter 20 of St John's gospel, the Scriptures tell us very little about this disciple. We do know, however, that Thomas was very loyal. In John 11, when Christ announces that Lazarus has died, Thomas says to his fellow disciples: 'Let us also go, that we may die with him (11. 16).' Thomas had courage. He was devoted to our Lord, and he was willing to sacrifice himself for him if necessary.

Later on in St John's gospel, when Jesus tells his disciples that he was soon going to leave them and return to his Father, Thomas says, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' (14. 5). Thomas was a thinker. He was the type of person who wouldn't accept an answer unless he saw the truth in it and could understand it for himself. Thomas had a challenging, curious and inquisitive mind.

It is this same Thomas who misses out on Christ's second revelation of himself after his resurrection. On that very first Easter Sunday, that day when our Lord

revealed himself to Mary Magdalene, we read that he made a second appearance, and this time it was to his disciples. There the disciples were, in what was probably the same room where they had shared the Last Supper with Jesus. They are terrified. They have locked the doors so that no-one can get in. Who knows what might happen? The Jews who killed Christ must surely be looking for them, too. And suddenly, our Lord appears before them. He shows them the wounds on his hands and in his side. They can't believe it; they are overjoyed when they realise that yes, indeed, Jesus has conquered death. He's alive!

But sadly, Thomas is not with them to receive this news and this revelation. We are not told why. Perhaps Thomas had isolated himself from the other disciples so that he could be alone in his grief. We can imagine that Thomas, who was so devoted to Christ, would have been broken-hearted about his death. In any case, when Thomas later receives a visit from the disciples who share with him the wonderful news of our Lord's resurrection, Thomas cannot bring himself to believe it. He says to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe' (20. 25).

It is only when Jesus makes a third appearance and shows his wounds directly to Thomas that the doubting disciple says, 'My Lord and my God' (20. 28). Thomas's response is not only one of recognition; it is also one of worship. At long last, Thomas's doubts melt into humble adoration.

I wonder what your thoughts are about Thomas's story. If you're like me, this story makes me think about several things. It prompts me to ask some concrete questions, like 'What is doubt?' 'Does doubt have a role to play in faith?' And perhaps most importantly, 'What reaction does God have to doubt?'

As we consider what doubt is, I think that it is important to make one crucial statement: doubt is not the same thing as unbelief. The opposite of doubt is knowledge and certainty. A Christian doubter is someone who is on a journey, a quest, a search to find God and to understand more about him.

It can even be said that doubt is natural within faith. Not only *can* Christians doubt, but at some point or another, probably *all* Christians doubt. Like Thomas, we have doubts and express those doubts and questions. We have questions about God, the Scriptures, and the Christian faith; questions about why things happen; questions about the role that God plays in our world.

The fact that Christians have known moments of doubt is not new. At the end of St Matthew's gospel, we read: 'Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted' (28. 16-17). Even the disciples, those men who had lived and worked with Christ and who had accompanied him throughout his earthly ministry, even some of them *doubted* when he appeared before them after his resurrection.

Concerning the role that doubt plays in the Christian faith, the good news is that doubts, questions and scepticism can often be used to bring us to a deeper and a larger faith. During a period of doubt, for example, we might find ourselves motivated to study and learn. And through our reading and our studying, we may find that we can identify and correct false beliefs or notions that have crept into our faith. Or when we go through a period of doubt, we might find that we are prompted to seek the truth more than we have previously. We are reminded how much truth matters, and we have a renewed hunger to discover it and to own it. Not surprisingly, during this renewed search for truth, our faith may grow. It may be stretched and deepened.

Finally, when we consider how God reacts to doubt, we see that God cares about us when we doubt. We have already seen that our Lord came specifically to reveal himself another time to his disciples, knowing that Thomas would be there; and as soon as he appeared to them, he went over to Thomas so that he could address his doubts directly and specifically. And this leads us to a very important principle. When God sees that we are going through a period of doubt, he chooses to react, and he does this by revealing himself.

You see, God has understood something very important. He knows that faith involves certain beliefs. He knows that faith involves having an attitude of hope and confidence. But he also knows that fundamentally, faith – at its core – is trusting in a person. In our periods of doubt, in our times of questioning, God comes to us in Jesus and reveals himself as a person. In his time, and in his wisdom, he comes.

Amen.