

Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Easter, April 24, 2022

The word “Meme” is used on the internet for a picture with a saying attached to it. There is a meme that has been out for a number of years. It says, “Don’t believe everything you read on the internet.” And it is attributed to President Abraham Lincoln in the year 1963 (which is long before there was an internet, but almost a century after Abraham Lincoln died). And the picture is not of Abraham Lincoln. The picture is of the captain of the fictional starship Enterprise from the series Star Trek.

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Deacon Tom Ward sent me a commentary by Fr. Paul Gallagher, who mentioned:

“Most Westerners have become accustomed to a world of visible information...Through the capabilities of technology, we can search the bottom of the sea for a missing plane, the vastness of outer space, or the inner workings of the human heart.

“This same technology can be used to deceive, cover up, and convince us that we are exploring something real but in reality, only exist in our imaginations and a computer program...we experience a great effort to control the flow of information and influence our perception of reality in our political world and events of war taking place on the other side of the world.

“Obviously, this was not part of the world in which Jesus or the early disciples lived. But our forebears did live in a culture where deception and lying was the daily part of society. Trying to establish the truth was a challenge. Had Jesus really risen from the dead or did his disciple steal the body and just claim that he had risen?”

“The gospel for this second Sunday of Easter comes from John’s gospel and is trying to address the questions of: how those who had not experienced personally the resurrection of Jesus - or even known anyone who had - believe that Jesus had risen from the dead.”

[The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel.]

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My brothers and sisters, many works of art have been produced, and countless reflections have been given, emphasizing what must have been a hard-hearted stubbornness of Thomas for doubting. A slow re-reading of the gospel passage normally shows these versions of Thomas to be unwarranted.

Jesus doesn't chastise Thomas for not bending to peer pressure, for not going along with the crowd, or for not being – credulous. Jesus doesn't necessarily chide Thomas at all; He invites Thomas to believe. And says the words that have been the hallmark of this event throughout the ages, "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

But of course, that brings us back to our current use of the phrase "Doubting Thomas" – Those who have come after Thomas and the others are challenged to believe someone else's testimony.

In today's culture, we find ourselves surrounded by many who claim that somewhere in those first one hundred to three hundred (100-300) years of the Church, someone must have gotten the Resurrection wrong, must have passed down the story incorrectly, must have misinterpreted the literary genre, must have lied, or must have been very foolish. And then everyone else just assumed they were right.

But we in fact have the testimony of this first generations' witness. The Original Disciples were as skeptical of their experiences and of the reports of others as we think we would be. THEY tell us - that they did not just have an "Experience" of the Cosmic Christ, or whatever the latest phrase is for some kind of a Spiritual awakening. Jesus walked with them, talked with them, corrected them, taught them for three (3) years – and again – ate with them and taught them for forty (40) Days AFTER THE RESURRECTION.

And then they watched Him Ascend. And then – they still needed Pentecost to get through their skepticism.

Theirs was not some dream-like hope that Jesus meant something. Jesus Rose – and that means God has broken into the world in a new and life-altering way. Even in the midst of the world seeming to continue on in its regular way.

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We also have two-thousand (2,000) years' worth of saints who witness to the power of Christ. They tell of how their lives changed when they let Christ's mercy and love take over.

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And we still have that experience. Most of us at some point, or at many points, realize how little we have acted as if God does exist. And we rediscover that life changes when we really act as we believe. Hearts are mended, old scores are written off, burdens are lifted, grievances are weighed in the scales of what God has forgiven us, families are made whole.

But it is still a difficult position to be in. IT DOES take faith. So it is good to hear that "blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

In one of his books (God in the Docks, Chapter 4), C. S. Lewis addressed the question of which religion gives to its followers the greatest happiness. He answered,

"I haven't always been a Christian. I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. [Port is an alcoholic beverage] If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity." — C.S. Lewis

As someone noted who became a Christian only a few years back, "Can any vision finish the job of faith? Can Thomas' experience be enough, and if so, why not does God do this to everyone if God loves us? Memory can play tricks as one grows older. We are more blessed because of the faith we have received to believe even though we do not have the sight of those first huddle apostles, or of Thomas that week later."

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We not only have our experiences. We have the witness of the experiences of all those around us and of Christians throughout the ages. And the witness of those first Apostles, who experienced Christ Risen and have assured us that this is the same Christ we meet today.