

Release Your Faith

*A Sermon by Fr. Orlando J. Addison, Vicar
Holy Faith Episcopal Church
Port St. Lucie, Florida 34986
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Every second Sunday after Easter the Gospel lesson is the same, and it does not matter whether we are in liturgical year A, B, or C. Those who come to church on this occasion will read and hear the same story. In fact, this Sunday is called doubting Thomas' Sunday, because of the story from the Gospel according to John, which we have heard and read this morning.

However, this description of Thomas being the doubting one is unfair because after the resurrection he became an excellent Apostle together with the others. It is unfair because we do not label Peter, for example, as the "denying Peter" for denying Jesus the night before His crucifixion, and we do not label the other disciples who ran away from the cross as quitters, or cowards, or betrayers. We have high admiration and respect for what the others did, but when it comes to Thomas, we only remember him for doubting the Resurrection of Jesus.

There is much more to the life of Thomas than the story we have heard about his doubting. For instance, Thomas was the one who said to his fellow disciples when Jesus invited them to go with him to Bethany in order to visit Lazarus who was already dead "let us also go, that we may die with him,".

Then in John 14:5, Jesus told His disciples that he was going to prepare a place for all believers and that they knew where He was going, but it was Thomas who posed the central question - "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Then later, it was Thomas, after the resurrected Christ presented himself to the disciples in the upper room, who made the most profound confession of faith when he said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!"

These are some Biblical stories about Thomas with which many people are not familiar. These stories show that there is much more to Thomas' life that people need to know.

If we take the doubting story out of context without showing Thomas' life before and after His eyes were opened when he finally saw Jesus in the upper room then, perhaps, many will doubt the risen Christ and believe in their hearts that the resurrection never happened. Some unbelievers might even go further -- coming to the conclusion that if Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples, doubted the resurrection, then it is ok for *them* to live the rest of their lives doubting the existence of Jesus and questioning his resurrection.

However, this is not the end of the story, and it would be wrong to come to this conclusion. If we end the story with this particular incident, we fail to see the larger picture, which is to recognize, with Thomas, that the one who died on the cross is now alive, and not only that He lives, but that He is also Lord and God of all.

Because he believed, Thomas became a missionary and traveled to India and the Middle East sharing the Good News of the resurrected Christ. When Jesus appeared in the upper room to Thomas and the other disciples, He did not create faith in the Apostle, instead, his appearance released the faith, which was already in Thomas.

Beloved, we all have had doubts at one point in our lives, and in fact, many of us still doubt certain things. For example, some of us doubt our future SUCCESSES because of the way things are going in our lives; we do not know if we are going to get to the place, we would like to be. We doubt the economy will get better soon, or if we will be able to pay our bills on time without having to worry about them, or that we will have enough money saved for vacation or retirement. We doubt the housing market will improve fast enough to help people struggling with the possibility of foreclosure. We doubt that one day researchers will find a cure for cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure and other deadly illnesses. We doubt that our children and grandchildren will be able to make it in our society. We doubt that Holy Faith will one day grow in numbers and in spirit, that it will become a vibrant and dynamic congregation and become a unified church in this city.

We doubt that our lives will one day improve, and we doubt that the challenging problems which we are facing today, will one day be resolved.

The doubts we have do not reflect the lack of faith and trust in God's power to help us in overcoming all our situations. What it shows is that our faith in Jesus is there, it is in our hearts, but remains captive in side ourselves and we need to set it free.

We are too timid with our faith, we protect it, we build a fence around it because we are afraid to set it lose, or to let it be hurt. We have personalized our faith in Christ, it has become our possession and we are not willing to share it with anyone else. It is my faith, this is what I believe and no one can take it away from me.

This attitude of personalized faith is what enables us to doubt. Nowhere in the New Testament will you find Jesus and the Apostles inviting us to have faith and to keep it to ourselves. On the contrary, Jesus and the Apostles were very clear about what we should do with our faith in God, and that is to share it with others, to testify to others the wonders of God's love through Jesus, to witness to the world the awesome God we have, to share with others how our faith in the resurrected Christ has set us free.

Once we are able to release the faith that is trapped in the dungeons of our hearts creating all sorts of doubts, then we will be able to believe with confidence that with God's help the economy will get better, the housing market will rise again, that our situation will improve, that our bodies will heal from all infirmities, that the church will be united and that our children will be able to make it in this society.

If we are able to release the faith we have in Christ, then like Thomas, we will not be ashamed to share Jesus' love with others, to invite them to come and worship Christ at **HOLY FAITH** and we will have no problem believing that God is at work in this parish, and that it is possible for this congregation to become a vital and dynamic church for God's Glory.

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