
THE ANTS IN THE PANTS OF FAITH

Today's gospel reading is the story of the world's most famous doubter.

- JESUS had returned to life.
- The news was spreading quickly among HIS disciples.
- And on the Sunday evening of the resurrection, JESUS appeared to them, but Thomas wasn't there.
 - The disciples believed but Thomas said he couldn't or wouldn't.

I think Thomas gets a bad rap because of this one story.

- Here are all the other disciples believing, but Thomas wouldn't.
 - Yet, consider that all the others had been there when JESUS appeared.
 - They had seen and they believed.
 - Thomas wanted nothing more than this.
 - "Unless I see the marks of HIS wounds, I will not believe."

We're told that Thomas' nickname was Didymus which means "twin."

- We don't know, however, what kind of twin Thomas was.
 - An actual twin?
 - A twin in appearance to someone, perhaps even JESUS?
 - A twin by profession, perhaps a carpenter?
 - Carpenters have to touch and see a board to know if it is straight and properly finished.
 - Perhaps this is why Thomas needed to touch and see JESUS.
 - For Thomas, touching and seeing were the only things that would overturn his doubts.

How many times in history have doubts limited or held back human beings?

- For much of history, people doubted that the earth circled the sun.
- Many, even today, believe the earth is flat and that you can fall off the edge.
- Who could believe that a ton of metal could float in the water, much less fly in the air?
- Once we did learn how to fly, it was doubted that a plane could exceed the speed of sound without disintegrating.
- Or that you could actually leave the gravity of the earth to walk on the moon?
 - What if those doubts had prevailed?

Or could you imagine that someone who was dead could return to life?

- Surely, many of us would have doubted like Thomas.

Let's face it.

If we are honest with ourselves, we've all had our doubts at times.

- Is there really a GOD?
- Was JESUS GOD?
- Could JESUS have performed all the miracles the Bible says HE did?
- Does heaven truly exist?
- Does GOD love everyone?
- Will GOD forgive the things that I've done?

Everyone has doubts from time to time, but that's alright.

- Doubts actually serve a purpose.

Doubts are one of GOD'S tools for helping our faith grow.

- Fredrick Buechner, in his book Wishful Thinking, says this:
Anyone who says he doesn't have doubts is either kidding himself or asleep. Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it moving and alive.
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One hundred years ago, the fishing industry had a problem.

- Frozen cod, when thawed out, became mushy and tasted flat,
 - while fresh cod was firm and flavorful.
 - Simply putting live cod in railcars filled with water to transport it didn't solve the problem.
 - What to do?
- Catfish are natural predators of codfish.
 - So, when they put the cod into the waterfilled railcars, they also threw in some catfish.
 - Swimming around as they traveled across the country, trying to avoid the catfish, kept the cod fresh and delicious.

Doubt can be to faith what catfish are to cod.

- They keep it moving and alive.
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Still, some people require greater proof than others.

- Woody Allen has said, "I would have no trouble believing in GOD if GOD would just deposit \$1,000,000 in a Swiss bank account in my name."
- King Herod said to JESUS, "Just do a miracle for me."
- Thomas demand was, "I just need to see the holes in HIS body."

We all have doubts.

- So, how can doubts help our faith grow?
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Well, I think it's important to avoid the extremes.

- And there are three that can be problematic.
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1) Don't get stuck-in-the-mud of doubts.

- Rather, step out in faith.

Stuck-in-the-mud churches never let their budget exceed their expected income.

- They just can't believe that GOD could fill the GOD-gap between income and expenses.
- They won't start a new ministry unless GOD gives them a clear sign to proceed and assures them of the needed funds.

Stuck-in-the-mud Christians also won't step out in faith.

- They won't take the risk of sharing their faith with someone who doesn't believe.
 - They doubt that person would come to faith because of their witness unless someone came back from the dead.
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2) Don't rely on blind faith.

- Don't assume that if GOD wants it to happen, it just will.
 - Their doubts about GOD working through them leads them to take no action at all.
 - They think that the Church has been fine for 2,000 years, so GOD will just take care of things.
 - They forget that the Church of today is here because of those in previous generation who opened their eyes to the faith needs around them and acted boldly.

3) Don't just sit in the misery of your doubts.

- Get involved with other Christians.

Thomas continued to meet with the disciples and was there a week later when JESUS came to them again.

- In the midst of Christian community, JESUS provided the answer to Thomas' doubts.

By the way, Thomas later traveled to India to share his faith in CHRIST JESUS.

- Thomas died there as a martyr for his LORD.
- Today, there are more Christian churches in India named for Thomas than for anyone else besides the blessed Virgin Mary.

4) Don't let the doubts of others infect you.

- Consider those doubts, but look for answers based on faith.

Two men were traveling by train.

- The older man was reading the Bible.
 - The younger man said to him, "Loaves and fishes to feed thousands, Do you believe that?"
- "Yes, I do," the older man replied.
 - The younger man exclaimed, "You're brainwashed. I'm a scientist. There are no miracles. Everything can be explained and is provable. No scientist would buy into that ridiculous thinking."
- The older man did not reply but continued to read his Bible.

When the train reached its destination, the two men got up to leave the train.

- The older man paused for a moment to introduce himself to the younger.
- "My name is Louis Pasteur."
 - This foolish believer was also a scientist and the man who discovered both the rabies vaccination and the process of pasteurization,
 - and who believed in JESUS.

I don't like to call Thomas "Doubting Thomas."

I prefer to call him "Lucky Thomas."

- Thomas was lucky that his doubts didn't keep him from actually seeing JESUS when HE appeared again.
 - For Thomas, seeing was believing.

But I think in some ways, we are luckier than Thomas.

- We haven't seen JESUS, but we still believe.
- And for us, that can lead to our recognizing the ways that JESUS is active in the world today.
 - For as and for millions of others people of faith, believing is seeing.

Don't let your doubts become a barrier for you.

- Instead, let them push you to go deeper,
 - to seek the new and more meaningful faith GOD has waiting for you.

Doubts can actually lead you to a closer and more profound relationship with GOD.

- Doubts when you have them can really be a good thing.
 - Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith.