

“... be no longer in doubt but have belief.” (John 20:19-31)

* As we continue to celebrate new life during the fifty days of the Easter Season this continuation should emphasize the celebration of the one Great Sunday, marked by Jesus' resurrection. The church calendar speaks of Sundays of Easter rather than Sundays after Easter. This season also includes the Ascension Day. But in order to preserve the importance of the Great Sunday we will not speak of the Ascension Day, rather we will highlight the final ten days of Easter as a time of expectation, prayers and devotions until the promised Day of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The liturgical color of the Season is white, symbolizing our Christian baptism and sinless life of the age to come.

* When we discuss the genesis of the Christian faith there are at least two aspects to consider: the natural and the spiritual. Speaking of the natural aspect we say that faith results from human perceptions, mostly through sight and hearing. This process cannot avoid casting doubt on what people see and hear. As we know, John's Gospel emphasizes the seven miraculous signs, beginning with "turning the water into wine" and finishing with "the raising of Lazarus". Jesus performed these signs progressively, for the benefit of the people's faith. If there was doubt in people's minds, they looked for another confirmation of Jesus' deity; they learned his teachings; they observed his piety; they referred to what the Scripture says about the Messiah and they were waiting for another miracle. Human faith, as I said before, is also an offspring of the Spirit that comes to God's people through the Word and the Sacraments. However, this sermon focuses only on the natural aspect of faith, as found in today's Gospel reading – "the disciples saw and believed."

* When we read the 20th chapter of John's Gospel it might sound strange that at the very heart of the Easter gospel, when the mighty act of Christ' resurrection occurred; when the triumphant sound of the of Easter trumpets exploded in celebration, there we also find plain, old fashioned doubt. Friends, on such a grand occasion as Easter morning, we would have expected the disciples to have been filled with awe and adoration. But on that first day of the week, after Jesus' appearing to many disciples, there was still doubt. The theme of doubt is present elsewhere in the resurrection tradition in (Mt 28:17; Lk 24:37-38, Joh 20:24-28).

* However doubt in itself is not as bad as it might seem. Five centuries ago, the Polish astronomer Copernicus doubted that the Earth was the center of the Universe. Christians around him were quoting Bible passages that proved the old belief. Copernicus doubted their short view and his doubt led him to a larger and deeper understanding of the Universe. In another example from the past, during the time of Columbus certain Christians were using the Bible in such a way that they considered the Earth to be as flat as a table. They believed that if you sailed too far into the Atlantic Ocean, your ship would fall over the edge of the Earth. Columbus doubted the medieval belief that the Earth was flat and his doubt led to great discoveries.

* Scientists also have deal with doubts. Thus in the teachings of 17th century French mathematician and philosopher Descartes we found the theory of doubt. The philosopher suggested systematically doubting

everything until one arrived at clear, simple idea that is beyond doubt. The phenomenon of doubting is also treated with enthusiasm by poets, novelists and artists. For instance, Lord Byron, 19th century English poet wrote, “There is something Pagan in me that I cannot shake off. In short, I deny nothing, but doubt everything”. As for artists and their work, the painting, “Peter and John Running to the Tomb” by Eugene Burnand ,that was colorfully printed with my Easter sermon, should be fresh in your memory. The painting focuses on Peter and John running fast to the empty tomb. Their feelings mingle with positive and negative expectations, with a double question in their mind: “has Jesus risen from the dead or not?” The disciples doubted the woman’s message and it led them to explore the tomb, and after that they believed. In summary we conclude that doubt encourages rethinking. Its purpose is more to sharpen the mind than to change it.

Doubt can be used to pose a question, get an answer and push for a decision.

But Christianity does not welcome doubt as a permanent condition, like in Lord Byron’s poetry, for instant. Christians may doubt but should not live a doubting way of life!

* Now, let’s consider Thomas’ doubting. Do we support him for such a lack of certainty when he refused to believe his friends? “We have seen the Lord,” the friends cry. “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger on the mark of the nails, and place my hand on his side,

I will never believe” was the answer of stubborn skeptic. I am pretty sure there may be occasions when we should not believe everything that our friends imagine or what the media forecasts, or even what some preachers tell you; however, we must trust and believe the Apostles’ testimony at face value without any doubt! Certainly we understand people who doubt information from the media but we should not praise the same people who reject the authority of the Scriptures. Meanwhile we should understand that the Scriptures are not a key to resolve scientific disputes as the medieval Christians attempted to do; rather the Bible is about God and man, it is about life and death, it is about resurrection and punishment, not about geography or the planetary system. We may doubt what people say about the future or what they saw or experienced, but we must trust and believe the Gospels, particularly when they witness of Jesus’ resurrection, the forgiveness of sins, his second coming, the Judgment and the life everlasting, without any doubt! We have all the proof we need in the testimony of the believers recorded in the Bible. Jesus says, “... a blessing will be on those who have belief though they have not seen me!” (John 20:29).

* Nevertheless, in the church of Corinth some people had begun to doubt the prophetic account in Scriptures. They said, “... there is no resurrection of the dead” (1Co 15:12). Then the Apostle replied: “but if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.” Therefore if we believe in Christ’s resurrection there is no reason to doubt our own resurrection in the life of the world to come. The Bible and the Creeds clearly teach that the dead will rise to receive their reward. But let’s praise doubt that leads us to find truth in whatever we’ve heard, read or seen in the media, politics, marketing and cetera. Again don’t let your heard and mind doubt Jesus’ resurrection or his deity as our text says, “... be no longer in doubt but have

belief,” (v.27). We are given to believe in Jesus --- not to doubt! Jesus promises rewards to those who will keep faith and trust in him, “a blessing will be on those who have belief though they have not seen me!” (v.29)

* Friends, as we’ve noticed God praises people’s faith in his Son but not their doubt. On one occasion Jesus says, “I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith,” (Luk 7:9). After that the intercessor was blessed with the healing of his servant. On the other hand, our Saviour never once said, “I praised you for your great questioning of the prophetic writings in the Scriptures.” Instead, he said that if you have the power of faith and do not doubt in His name, you will be able to do great works of love walking in the Spirit.

* Finally, thinking back to the end of our text, after all that questioning and doubting and skepticism, Thomas saw Jesus and falling on his knees he said, “My Lord and My God.” His confession were the words of a recovered skeptic. Without seeing Jesus with our physical eyes or putting our fingers onto the nail prints in His hands or touching His side, those words are ours as well, "MY LORD AND MY GOD" (John 20:28).

Beloved, grace be with all of you.

Amen.