

Easter 2B (4/19/09 – *When NOT Seeing Is REALLY Believing*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]

We all know the old saying: *Seeing is believing*. It is basically a paraphrase of the “Gideon’s Fleece” Thomas laid out in our *Holy Gospel Lesson* for today – the demand he made if he were going to believe that Jesus had risen: ***Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe.*** [JN 20.25] In fact, for Thomas, just seeing Jesus wasn’t enough – Thomas wanted to dig into Christ’s wounds ... the wounds he had seen bleeding as Christ hung on the Cross ... atoning for the sins of the world ... the wound inflicted to make sure that Jesus really was dead before Joseph of Arimathea was allowed to take the lifeless body down from the Cross and give Jesus a decent (though hasty) burial before the Sabbath.

Interesting, then ... when you think about it carefully – for Thomas even seeing **wasn’t** believing ... but seeing **and** touching. Thomas wasn’t merely doubting ... but – as our reading accurately translates – ***disbelieving*** ... in fact, disbelieving “with a vengeance” we might say. ***Do not disbelieve, but believe***, Christ says [20.27] – ***Stop being unbelieving (faithless), but believing (faithful)*** ... to put it a bit more literally.

But we can’t fault Thomas alone. **All** of the disciples are having the same difficulty – this lack of faith – even after declaring to Thomas: ***We have seen the Lord.*** [20.25a] Did you notice that both before **and** after seeing Jesus, the disciples were cowering behind locked doors? ***On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews*** – that’s how the resurrected Jesus found His “faithful” disciples on that first Easter night ... hiding behind locked doors. But even after seeing Jesus ... even after hearing His words, ***Peace be with you*** [20.19, 21] ... even after receiving Christ’s commission to go out with the Gospel just as Christ had been sent by the Father ... even after receiving the Holy Spirit and Christ’s authority to forgive and retain sins [20.21-23] – despite **all** that from the risen Lord Jesus Christ: ***Eight days later, His disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”*** [20.26] The disciples were still having a faith problem – Thomas wasn’t alone (though he was certainly quite adamant in his disbelief). If Christ is sending them out with the Gospel of God’s love and forgiveness by means of His Son – just as He had been sent – why were they yet cowering? Either because they don’t fully believe their commission (and that Christ would

guard and keep them from harm) ... or because, if they are being sent **also** to die – like Christ – they don't want to go that way, so they hide themselves from harm. Either way, their faith is faulty – and Thomas isn't alone.

In fact, Thomas is in “good company” – by which I mean that there are literally hordes who suffer from Thomas' **disbelief** regarding the resurrected Christ ... including **us!** Our own faith is frail ... faulty ... and fearful! We're not any better than Thomas – so let us not boast. If we believed Christ's Resurrection – and our own in Him – like we ought, we would have no fear (nor even concern) about death whatsoever (except in the case of those who do not believe). If we believed Christ's Resurrection – and all the blessings that come with it – as we ought, we would not be afraid of suffering for a time in this life ... for we would be unshakably certain of full and eternal deliverance (in God's good and perfect timing) ... and we could say with St. Paul: ***For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*** [PHI 1.21] ... in no wise doubting ... not even for a moment ... but confidently trusting. If we believed Christ's Resurrection – and our own blessed position as Christ's brethren ... with the privilege of sharing the Good News of His death for our sins and His Resurrection for our eternal life – we would welcome those who might come to persecute us for the sake of our faith; for we would always and only see it as another opportunity to proclaim Christ (***give a defense of the hope that is in us*** [1PT 3.15]) ... and what better witness than to faithfully hold on to Christ and proclaim His life in the face of death.

Our sinful flesh is constantly tempted to look at difficult events in our lives – illness ... financial hardship ... accident ... or the death of a beloved family member or close friend – as the visible sign of God's **displeasure** with us. After all, we know we are sinners ... deserving of His wrath – we sin daily in thought, word, and deed. We see and feel the pain and suffering around us ... in our own lives – and in seeing (and feeling) we believe that God is angry with us ... warning us ... punishing us. Isn't that quite often the first thought that comes to mind in the midst of trials and tribulations? But when we understand Christ's glorious Resurrection – and His death on the Cross that preceded it – then we can place all things that happen in our lives in the proper perspective. We can place **everything** in our lives under the shadow of the Cross and in the bright rays of certain hope of the Resurrection. We can place **all** things that happen in our lives under the Cross by which Christ has once-for-all won our forgiveness ... and in the glorious light of the Resurrection by which Christ assures us that we, too, shall live with Him forever in heaven! That's ***When NOT Seeing Is REALLY Believing!*** When we **don't** yet see that light at the end of the tunnel ... when we **don't** yet see improvement in our condition (or that of a loved one) ... when we **don't** yet see the life of the resurrected Christ filling all things with life and putting death to

death ... when we **don't** yet see Christ's heavenly glory, but only the most **inglorious** results of sin in the world ... impinging on our lives. At times like that we can be doubtful ... **disbelieving** – just like Thomas and the other Apostles and disciples.

But then Christ comes into our midst – despite the doors of our minds and hearts being locked for fear. Christ comes into our midst with all the benefits of His death and resurrection ... all the fruits of His **Good Friday** and **Easter Sunday** ... all of His forgiveness, life, and salvation ... all of His peace. Through His **Holy Word** Christ comes to us speaks to us in the midst of our troubles and fears, saying: **Peace be with you**. [JN 20.19, 21, 26] And that word of peace is not mere wish ... but a peace that surpasses human understanding ... a word that truly brings and applies His divine, loving, eternal peace to salve our hurts and pains and worries. By the His **Holy Absolution** – through His called and ordained servants of the Word – Christ comes into our midst ... into the midst of our tribulations ... into the midst of our repentance over our many sins (including doubt, fear, and **disbelief**) ... saying: **If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them** [20.23]. When I speak to you the Word of Christ's forgiveness, it is not merely my own word, but Christ Himself speaking through me ... because He has sent me to you to speak His **Peace be with you** in His Name and in the Name of the Father Who sent Him to work that peace by His Cross and Resurrection. By His **Holy Supper** – celebrated here Sunday after Sunday according to Christ's command ... using Christ's Own **Holy Thursday** Word (by which He Himself consecrates the elements) – Christ comes into our midst with the very Body and Blood by which He worked your forgiveness and peace with God the Father on **Good Friday** ... the very same Body and Blood in which He rose victorious from the tomb on **Easter Sunday** ... after having trampled sin, death, devil, and hell under His nail-pierced feet. And in His **Holy Supper** Christ gives you **His** forgiveness ... He gives you **His** life ... He gives you **His** strength over sin and death and grave ... He gives you **His** glorious, everlasting victory.

In Christ our Lord we learn **When NOT Seeing Is REALLY Believing!** As the Son hung, dying upon the Cross ... and darkness covered the whole land from noon until three [LK 23.44] ... and the Father poured out His righteous wrath against our sin, our Lord cried out: **Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?** [MK 15.34] Yet, even **not** seeing the Father's love – indeed, rather, seeing only the Father's fury against the sins of the whole world, which He bore in His flesh ... and which He had **become** in our stead [2COR 5.21] – our Lord Jesus Christ did not leave off believing; for immediately afterward He cried out with a loud voice: **Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit** [LK 23.46]. But in seeing Christ's faithfulness until the end, we have not

merely an example – but in Him, by Him, and by His faithfulness ... by His faithful life and death and resurrection – we receive the very faith that endures through all trials and tribulations until we behold the risen Christ face to face.

Christ's Resurrection appearances to His Apostles and disciples – especially to Thomas – and our remembrance of these events is more than a “pep-talk.” It is by the very Word that Christ speaks ... by the very Word of His *peace be with you* ... by the very Word of His forgiveness ... and by His Own Word that places His very Body and Blood in the Sacraments that **you** receive Christ and all His benefits. **You** have the peace of Christ. **You** receive His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of your sins and the strengthening of your faith. And though you do not yet see – except by the eyes of faith – yet **you have believed**. Blessed are **you**, says Christ [JN 20.29] – blessed are **you** indeed!

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]