

## When our Faith is Challenged.

This second Sunday of Easter is dealing with the REAL ISSUE that we all are going through right now under the stress of the Virus. These readings for today are dealing with the same issues we deal with when we are grieving for the loss of a loved one or even a loss of a Job or at any time we hit an unexpected wall or a sudden turn in our lives!

**Some people think that if you have enough faith life will be plain sailing for you.** But this is not so. The fact that we can swim doesn't prevent us from being knocked about by the waves. In the same way faith doesn't shield us from the hard knocks of life or death. What, then, does faith do? It gives us bearings and thus enables us to live in a topsy-turvy world without getting lost or giving in to despair.

Just as swimmers trust that if they don't panic, and if they do a few simple things, then the power of the sea will uphold them, so believers entrust their lives to a power greater than themselves, a power greater than us all. This power is the power of God, who brought his Son, Jesus, back from the dead.

**Today's readings describe trials of faith, which if successfully negotiated, will lead to a recognition of the presence of God.** St. Peter tells us in the second reading that faith needs to be tested to be proven. Through trial our faith becomes stronger. We are better prepared for the future which we do not know by the trials of faith we receive. Peter says that a trial of faith is to believe without seeing. It is our faith, drawn from Jesus' resurrection, that grows stronger by trial, leading us to our ultimate goal, salvation.

In the gospel we hear the famous story of Thomas. It is a story of faith. Can Thomas believe without seeing? When the apostles tell him that they have seen the Lord, Thomas must make a decision; his faith is tested. While he certainly had faith as a follower of Jesus, nevertheless when this specific trial of faith arises, he is not up to the test. Thomas can only believe what he sees. Thomas' faith is limited; he is not willing to venture out. Jesus admonishes Thomas, "Do not persist in your unbelief, but believe! You became a believer because you saw me. Blest are they who have not seen me and have believed." (John 20:27b, 29)

It seems that after Good Friday Thomas had cut himself off from the other apostles, and walked alone. This was a big mistake. But we must remember that he was in deep grief. People who are grieving have a tendency to isolate themselves. While it is understandable it is not helpful. In cutting himself off from the other apostles, Thomas made things more difficult for himself.

However, it seems that he hadn't cut himself off completely. Whenever he met them, he would have noticed a difference in them. Their fear was largely gone, and had been replaced by joy and peace. It was clear that someone had breathed new life into them. They claimed that they had seen Jesus. But Thomas refused to take their word for it. He had to be sure. We can sympathize with Thomas. **He was merely echoing the human cry for certainty.** However, here on earth there is no such thing as absolute certainty about spiritual things. If there was, faith would not be necessary.

**All of us experience trials of faith.** Especially during difficult times like the ones we are going through now. How do we fare? If our faith is tried through sickness or death, do we continually ask why a person we care about is sick or why God would choose to claim a person close to us? Or do we seek ways from which we can draw renewed and strengthened faith from the trial we must endure. What if faith is tried through the pain of unemployment? If we lose our job or cannot find work, do we allow it to destroy our faith?

Do we become angry? Do we cry out, "Where is God?" Or does such a trial of faith allow us greater communion and better understanding of those who are chronically unemployed, those who cannot work

because of a mental or physical handicap? What if our faith is tested through troubled or broken relationships? Does the separation of friends, the pain of divorce, or rejection in love make us throw in the towel?

**It was only when this doubting apostle, Thomas rejoined the community that he encountered the risen Jesus, and so found faith again.** To be a believer, or just a spiritual person, in today's world can be a lonely business. We need support. Here is where the community comes in. It is only with the help of the community that we can resolve our doubts and sustain our faith. We live as members of a community of believers whose common faith strengthens the faith of each individual.

We see the kind of community the first Christians enjoyed. They supported one another by praying and worshipping together, and by a loving service of one another. Our ministry to one another consists not so much in doing things for one another, as in travelling together, listening to and learning from one another. We have all had trials of faith. Let us triumph over the trials of our life. Let us be strengthened by our faith. May we always believe that the trials of faith we weather can bring us closer to God and to eternal life.