

## “Let’s all try to be more like Thomas!”

It’s said that death and taxes are the only two certainties in life. But every year at this time, we’re reminded of a third certainty, and that is: on the Sunday after Easter, we are going to hear the story of the appearance of the risen Jesus to Thomas.

Over the years, Thomas has received a lot of bad press. In fact, his name has become part of a common pejorative expression: If someone calls you a Doubting Thomas, they’re not paying you a compliment. On the positive side, however, I’m fairly certain that Thomas, had he lived long enough, would have become an Episcopalian. And the reason I think that, is because Thomas was willing to use his brain, he was willing to doubt, and he was willing to go against the tide of popular opinion. And today’s gospel tells us how all that worked out.

So, our gospel reading takes place eight days following that first Easter Sunday. Already, the risen Jesus has appeared to at least four women, and the disciples, and they’re all convinced that Jesus has returned from the grave. But Thomas wasn’t at any of those appearances, and when they tell him about their experiences with the risen Jesus, he refuses to believe the things they’re saying to him.

And it’s not like Thomas didn’t *hear* Jesus predict his death and resurrection; he did. And it’s not like Thomas didn’t *see* Jesus perform some fairly miraculous things; he did. But when push comes to shove, Thomas still would rather exercise his right to use the brain God gave him, than to believe what is, for him at that moment in time, *unbelievable*. I mean, think about it: Thomas is at the epicenter of one of the greatest events of all history, and, in effect, he’s willing to attribute the tremors under his feet to his neighbor’s stereo being turned up too loud. Why? Because, as I said before, he’s *not* afraid to use his brain.

Back in 2003, when Dan Brown’s novel *The da Vinci Code* was published, Peggy and I read it, and I think we both enjoyed the heck out of it. However, I also knew that it would cause a stir. And so, I wasn’t surprised when I started seeing books being published that supposedly refuted the claims made in *The da Vinci Code*. And I wasn’t surprised when I started hearing about teachers and preachers who offered classes and seminars in which they debunked the ideas set forth in *The da Vinci Code*. And I certainly wasn’t surprised when I stumbled upon a “Special Report” on one of the cable channels purporting to “unveil” all the errors in *The da Vinci Code*. And I remember being fairly amused by all of the attempts to undo all the damage wrought by that awful book, and for one main reason: the book was published *as a work of fiction*. Despite that little fact, a lot of people, and for reasons that escape me, decided to read it as if it were gospel.

But I don't think Thomas would have had that sort of problem. In fact, given the willingness of so many people to believe almost *anything* they hear, makes it easier for me to forgive Thomas for not wanting to believe *everything* he's told. In fact, I think we need to be more like Thomas.

So, all this brings to mind, two points to think about.

First, the Christian faith was never intended to be a faith that excluded doubts or uncertainties. And so, if you ever find yourself with doubts or uncertainties with regards to your faith, that doesn't mean you're a bad Christian, or an unfaithful follower of God. Rather, it simply means that you're a human being, and that you're making use of all the faculties that God has given to you. However, the challenge of our faith is that, whenever we do have doubts or questions, that it's our responsibility to seek after more information and find answers. Because we don't serve God well as ill-informed men and women. Nor can we serve each other from a position of ignorance or misunderstanding.

In other words, discover what the truth is, and then you'll discover that that truth may just set you free.

My second point is this: the Christians faith was never meant to be a faith where we are required to accept as gospel whatever comes out of the mouth of our pastor, minister, or priest — *or book* — because no one person can have all of the answers, or be in possession of all knowledge.

Think about the difference between Thomas and the other disciples.

The faith-claim being made by the other disciples, included the belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead. The faith-claim that Thomas was making *did not* include that. And the reason for the difference between them ... was experience. The other disciples had experienced the risen Jesus; and it wouldn't be until Thomas had experienced the same thing, that he would be able to embrace their proclamation.

And the same thing can be said about Christians today: often the only things that separates one group or denomination from another, are the experiences they've had. And so this means that we need to be patient with each other. Even though we may be reading the same version of the Bible, or attending the same church each Sunday, or hearing the same sermons, so long as we have different life-experiences, there will be differences among us.

So, if you want to read books like *The da Vinci Code*, be my guest, but remember that it's a work of fiction. It's not true. But if, in your reading of that book, you find yourself tempted to believe some of the things contained in it, remember first to weigh the things you read against the testimony of scripture, and the traditional teachings of the church. But also — and this is just as importantly — *trust your common sense*. And seek out the advice and opinions of your fellow Christians, because we tend to work better, and get further, and understand more, when we're working together. And that, my friends, is how I believe God intended for it to be. Amen.