

When I was growing up, I was not very inclined to accept something just because someone told me. I was much more likely to be asking questions and challenging. So maybe it's not a surprise that when I was confirmed in fourth grade, I took Thomas as my patron saint. The poor fellow has been labeled "doubting Thomas" for a long time; but no one calls the others "doubters." I think Thomas offer a realistic depiction of a life of faith, right along with Mary who thought he was the gardener; those locked in the upper room thought he was a ghost; the disciples on the road to Emmaus didn't recognize him; the disciples who were fishing didn't realize it was Jesus. But they're not called doubters. Maybe Thomas' example is something positive to draw on rather than simply to disparage him. We may have forgotten that when other disciples were ready to desert him, it was Thomas who said, "Let's go with him [to Jerusalem], and die with him." What can we learn from Thomas?

First, in the incidents in the upper room we learn that faith doesn't exclude doubt and questions. There can be times when we wonder whether God is with us; Mother Teresa felt God's absence for decades. Faith doesn't make everything crystal clear; it can provoke inquiries and surface fears we thought we had set aside. Faith isn't just accepting what has been proven; it means taking to heart and acting on what hasn't been proven. With faith we can feel a kind of certitude that's based on deep trust; but it's not the same certainty that comes from seeing with our own eyes or having scientific proof.

Second, this episode reminds us that faith is mediated through others – family, friends, witnesses from history, and members of the Church. Thomas comes to a fuller expression of faith because he came back to the community of disciples rather than walk away, saying they were crazy. Eventually he had to take make that faith his own, but it started when he listened to others and not just himself.

Third, this experience of the risen Christ reminds us that faith is not limited to an acceptance of doctrines and creeds. It is based on personal experience with the Lord himself. The disciples had not written the Apostles Creed; they had not yet figured out the hypostatic union of Jesus Christ as both fully human and fully divine; they had not come to an expression of one God as a Trinity. They could not express what we now consider basics of our Christian faith. But Thomas did know that the Lord was present, and he responded to the risen Savior with faith, loyalty, and trust, and he accepted the Lord's gift of peace.

So there can be times when it seems to us that others have a strong faith and ours is wavering; or we may have separated ourselves from the community of faith and find it hard to come back; or we may simply be having doubts or asking hard questions – and this Gospel reminds us that it's OK. At the same time the Gospel also challenges us to come back to the community; to ask our questions, and to draw on the strength and faith of others. It challenges us to a faith that is more than intellectual assent to statements of faith and creed; it also invites us to deep loyalty and trust in the risen Christ even when we cannot see him or feel him.

The Gospels show us that we have many opportunities to encounter the risen Christ, even though he does not appear to us as he did to the apostles in those days after his resurrection. It still requires an act of faith. He still speaks to us in the Word; he touches us in the sacraments; he is with us in our brothers and sisters who belong to the same Body of which he is the head; he is the brother who is hungry and thirsty, the sister who is ill or imprisoned. You can see any of them; you can touch their hands and feet, and believe!