

## SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

John 20:19-31

*Jesus casts out all doubt*

*“With the doors locked for fear of the Jews”—the disciples, these first saints of the Christian Church, had the doors locked. Peter had the doors locked. Peter, who wrote in our second lesson: “These things [suffering, grief, and trial] have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”* How could the same Peter hide behind locked doors and offer such confident encouragement? He met Jesus, who conquers fear and doubt, because fear and doubt, like death, spring from sin and unbelief.

As most of you know, I am a nerd. As a nerd, I knew what I wanted to see when I went to Boston this week: colleges and historical sites. What particularly struck me were some inscriptions at Harvard. The first was on the philosophy department’s building in Harvard Yard. *“What is man that thou art mindful of him?”* In the book of Hebrews, this quotation is cited from the Psalms to demonstrate the divinity and power of our risen Lord and to prove that Christ became our brother, so that, as his brothers and sisters, we would become sons and daughters of God. It is gospel, but as I read it, I could not help wondering how many students and professors even know this quotation is Scripture or what the gospel is. I couldn’t help but wonder if most don’t now read that inscription as a declaration of existential nihilism: *“What is man that thou art mindful of him?”* In other words, “Why should God care about us and why should we care about him? Its all meaningless.” It brings to mind the irony of the fact that on this building and on many other buildings and monuments the same Latin word was inscribed: *“veritas,”* “truth.” Yet how many believe in *veritas* at this and other universities, let alone believe in the *“Veritas,”* Jesus Christ?

*“Didymus”* means “twin,” and Thomas has lots of twins in our day. *“I will not believe unless...”* That is the refrain of our generations and, barring any great swing in trends, that is the refrain of generations to come. Western society is a society of doubt. It only trusts what it can empirically prove by observation and experience, and even these things, many will insist, are only true for the one experiencing them, and not for others. Few believe in absolute or universal truth. Few really believe in any truth at all beyond the placebo truths we all construct for ourselves to make this disenchanting life bearable. Jesus is a crutch for the weak and so is Mohammed, so what is the difference if you believe in the one and your neighbor believes in the other? Whatever gets the job done and makes life easier.

How do we do battle with such thought? How do we confront such a culture? How do we deconstruct such a worldview? These are all good questions, but they are not questions for the Church. These are questions for the classroom, not the sanctuary. The sanctuary is not a place for questions, but for answers. Here the doubts and disillusionments of so many of our neighbors are not a roadblock, but an opening. Christ is never more vital and apropos than he is in a world of doubt, because Christ is the only Answer for the objections Adam and Eve gave birth to through unbelief. In a world that doesn’t know what or how to believe, Christ is the professor extraordinaire. Let him do the teaching, and let him use his best object lessons: his sacraments, which make his wounds and his person present before the eyes of the doubter.

*“But unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”* What was the disciples’ reply? Apparently they did not have one, because a week later Jesus felt the need to address the objection. Jesus was the Answer. The disciples had to learn this well, because when they faced similar objections later it would do them no good to present their office, training, eloquence, or person as the answer. They had to present Christ, catechizing the unbeliever in the Word, in Holy Communion, and in Holy Baptism, where we may not see Christ’s wounds, but we do receive the blessings that flow from those wounds.

As I walked around Harvard, I couldn’t help but wonder if I could hold my own there, and, even though Tricia assured me that I am as big a nerd and an even bigger one than most of those students, I couldn’t help but be jealous of them. They got to keep studying while I was endlessly busy in a parish. Satan struck where he knows there is a hole: my love for learning. I miss the classroom. I miss having time to translate, to read, to contemplate. I miss being in the academic ring.

But then I saw those quotes. *“What is man that thou art mindful of him?”* *“Veritas.”* I thanked God I knew where the first quote was from, and that so many pious and selfless souls had helped pay for me to learn to translate the second. I thanked God that I not only get to declare God is mindful of man, but I get to prove it as I preach and administer the gospel. I thanked God that I not only get to assert there is such a thing as truth, but introduce souls to Truth himself. I considered just how much some pay to have ivy minds full of doubt and how God would have us pay nothing at all for minds full of truth. I thanked God for creating such minds through this arrogant sinner, who would so often willingly trade a mind of Calvary rock for a mind of Areopagite mush.

*“Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”* We live in a doubting world, so what do we do? We do what Jesus did: we hold his body and blood, given and shed for it, before its very eyes. We hold *“my Lord and my God,”* Jehovah and Yahweh, the One who brought Israel out of Egypt and life out of death. In the midst of fear and doubt, we speak the gospel, saying, *“Peace be with you.”*

As we rode on the subway in Boston, I saw a girl reading Hebrew and asked her what she was reading. She was an Israelite reading fiction. How unfortunate! She was uniquely qualified to read non-fiction in Hebrew, to read the promises of Christ in the Old Testament. I thought of saying *“shalom,”* “peace,” as I got off the train, and I later kicked myself over it. I should not only have said *“shalom,”* peace, to show my knowledge, but introduced her to *“shalom,”* peace, to show my love for her.

We live in a world of doubt, but that is not an obstacle to the gospel, it is an opening, because whether or not people will admit it, doubt is the most discouraging and least fulfilling of human conditions. So let us proclaim Peace. Let us present Truth. Let us show the world his pierced side as we share the gospel. Let us show the world his pierced hands and feet as we reflect his love in our lives as members of his body. Let us address doubt with the only thing that produces certainty: the holy and infallible Word of God. You don’t have to convince them of its certainty. The Holy Spirit will do that. Just show them Christ, that they may see him, not with physical eyes, but with the eyes of faith. After all, that’s why *these words are written, that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* *“Peace be with you.”* Christ be with you. Amen.