

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Parishioners:

Some of you remarked that you found my homily last week on “Doubting Thomas” helpful. So I’ve decided to print it here. For those who didn’t find it helpful, perhaps it will make more sense in written form. *It’s worth a try.*

With my prayers,
Fr. Conley

The Gospel passage we have just heard is often referred to the story of “Doubting Thomas.” I think it would be more accurate to call it the story of “Angry Thomas.” If you’ve ever been mad at God you’ll understand what I mean.

Being mad at God happens to a lot of us. I’m not saying it’s right. Just that it happens. A year ago this past week I had an experience of being mad at God. At that time a good friend of mine, Fr. Bill Finch, died suddenly of a heart attack. He was the pastor of a large parish in Rockville and a hard worker. He was also very good to his fellow priests and well liked. When I first heard that he had died I was both sad and angry. Sad because we had been good friends for twenty-five years and I expected we would be friends for twenty-five more. I was also angry at God because his passing didn’t make any sense to me. Bill was only 54 years old and at a time when priests are in short supply, I couldn’t understand why the Lord would take him. Bill could have had many more years of productive ministry.

I think some of this is what Thomas was experiencing after the crucifixion of Jesus. It wasn’t what he expected. Why did God allow it to happen? What purpose did it serve? What good could come of it? I imagine he was angry at God and bitter about it all. So when the other Apostles tell him “We have seen the Lord.” In his pain and anger Thomas responded skeptically even I imagine sarcastically by saying “Yeah right. Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

The Gospel tells us that a week later Thomas got exactly what he asked for. The chance to touch the wounds of the Risen Lord. But when Jesus tells Thomas to touch His wounds Thomas doesn’t do it. Instead, knowing now that Jesus is truly risen, Thomas is touched by grace and healed of his anger and doubt. In fact, in that moment Thomas goes from doubting to making a stronger statement of faith than any of the other Apostles had made. While the other Apostles recognized Jesus as risen from the dead, Thomas sees Jesus’ true identity and proclaims “My Lord and My God.”

So what can we learn from Thomas’ experience? First of all, sometimes our suffering or the suffering of our loved ones or the suffering in the world in general can make us mad at God. We can find ourselves asking:

Why does God allow this to happen? What purpose does it serve? What good could come of it?
When we feel this way we should admit it to ourselves and tell the Lord that we’re mad and why. Admitting our anger is often necessary before the Lord can heal us.

Secondly, since there is often a connection between doubts about our faith and anger, or at least disappointment with God, we should pray for our loved ones who are going through difficulties that their faith in the Lord's care for them will be strong.

Thirdly, I think we also need to recognize that sometimes it is our own unreal expectations that cause our disappointments. Jesus had told Thomas and the other Apostles numerous times that He must suffer and die. The Lord hadn't deceived them. Likewise, when we are disappointed or even angry with God about how things are going, we should ask ourselves is it really possible that the Lord has misled us in some way? Has He really broken any of His promises to us? Or are we simply upset because life in this world can be hard? Remember we're not home yet and Jesus has told us that we must be willing to take up our crosses daily if we wish to follow Him.

When Thomas saw Jesus risen from the dead he understood that everything Jesus had suffered, and all the pain that he himself had experienced was all part of God's plan of redemption. St. Thomas understood it and with the other Apostles proclaimed it to the world. Tradition tells us that St. Thomas spread the Gospel to Persia and India, where he was martyred.

However, there are times when we don't understand the purpose behind the things that happen to us and those we care about. Then we must simply choose to believe in the Lord's plan for us even when we don't see where it is leading. Sometimes all we can do is surrender in faith, trusting that the loving God who raised Jesus from the dead, will also raise us up above the suffering we are experiencing. In the moments we need to make our own the prayer of faith of St. Thomas,

"My Lord and My God."

With my prayers,
Fr. Conley