

Second Sunday of Easter
(Divine Mercy Sunday)
April 11, 2021

Each year on this Sunday we hear the passage from the 20th chapter of John's Gospel about Christ appearing to the apostles in the upper room on that first Easter night. Thomas was not present and when the other apostles told him that they had seen the Lord, he *refused* to believe. "*Unless I see the mark of the nails in His hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in His side, I will not believe.*"

A week later, the Risen Lord appeared to the apostles again. This time Thomas was with them and when Jesus spoke to him and invited him to touch His scars, Thomas made the great profession of faith: "*My Lord and my God,*" to which Christ answered: "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.*"

This passage has forever labeled the apostle as "doubting Thomas." Many today can probably relate to "doubting Thomas." Maybe at some point in your life you have experienced doubts about fundamental articles of our faith such as the existence of God; the doctrine of the Trinity; the divinity of Christ; the Resurrection; the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist; or doubts about particular moral teachings of the Church, such as matters relating to abortion, contraception, the nature of human sexuality and marriage.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* distinguishes between *voluntary* and *involuntary* doubt. Voluntary doubt about the faith *deliberately*

disregards or *refuses* to hold as true what God has revealed and the Church proposes for belief. [It is a choice one makes to disbelieve.] Cultivating such doubt is dangerous as it can lead to spiritual blindness. Involuntary doubt, on the other hand, is different. It refers to a *hesitation* in believing due to difficulty in overcoming objections about the faith or anxiety arising from its obscurity (CCC 2088). It is not a choice but a plight.

I think it is helpful here to make an important distinction between having *doubts* and having *difficulties*. Not only are doubts and difficulties not the same thing, they are not even the same *kind* of thing. Doubt – and here I am speaking about what the *Catechism* calls voluntary doubt – is a decision. A difficulty is a dilemma.

Many times we may think that we are doubting our faith when in fact we may be merely puzzled by a seemingly abstruse teaching or struggling to live up to our Christian calling to holiness.

Doubts and difficulties are so different from each other that the great 19th century convert and theologian, Saint John Henry Newman, could honestly say, “Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt.”

I can vouch for this quote from personal experience. In my teens and my very early twenties I was a person who doubted much of what the Church taught. Honestly, I knew very little of what the Church taught and nothing of why it taught it, but that did not matter to me because I was not really interested. I had no commitment to the Faith. My doubt

was born out of a mixture of immaturity, ignorance, intellectual bias (masquerading as philosophical skepticism), and indifference.

Later I experienced a change of heart, a conversion, that made me desire to know the Faith and be open to the Church's teachings. I realized that if God was guiding His Church, then what it taught must be true even if it was contrary to how I looked at things or what the secular culture around me promoted or rejected. That sent me on a path of exploration – a deep, long, and prayerful personal study of the Faith.

I still had my intellectual difficulties with certain doctrinal and moral teachings but I had no doubts as to their truth. I realized that I was dealing with things bigger than myself; things about God and His designs. And so rather than dismiss them, I instead looked for insight from minds greater than my own; minds that were in harmony with Church teaching.

It took years of reading and reflecting, but I eventually came to an understanding of the things that had previously perplexed me to the point that now they made perfect sense.

But a key element in this journey was the grace of God and choice on my part not to doubt but to believe; and to look at difficulties not as obstacles to Faith but as invitations to explore and discover.