

Readings

Acts 5:12-16

Ps 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

Rev 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19

Jn 20:19-31

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I joined 12 other Augustinian friars this past February for an excellent silent retreat. The retreat house stood amid tea fields in central Japan, near Mount Fuji. We arrived late Sunday night, after dark.

The following day, after morning prayers, as we walked into the dining room, I was astonished by the beauty and the immensity of the magnificent, snow-clad mountain rising majestically not far from our dining room window. The dazzling white of the slopes contrasted starkly with the deep blue, cloudless sky above and the dark green forest surrounding its base. I savored the sight of the mountain as we partook of our meal in meditative silence.

Then, on Tuesday morning, the mountain was gone! It was an overcast, grey morning. Nothing but unattractive, dull, dense clouds in the sky in the direction that showed such beauty the day before.

I chuckled to myself. I found myself mentally playing with a metaphor about seeing and believing. I know that I saw the mountain on Monday. I took delight in its grandeur. Now, it was Tuesday, and I could no longer see it. Does this mean that I no longer believe that it exists? Of course not.

The mountain seemed to play games with us for the rest of the week. It showed us its full beauty from time to time and, on some days, seemed to pop in and out of the clouds that blew around it.

In our spiritual journeys with the Lord, although we do not “**see**” the Lord with our eyes, we sometimes otherwise sense his loving presence in our lives in very intense ways. We are absolutely sure that he is with us. And sometimes things are tough – it’s harder to “see” the Lord. It’s times like that when we depend on faith. Faith tells us that although a cloudy sky can mask the presence of something of immense majesty and beauty, we can, at the same time, know for sure that the magnificent object of our love and our faith is still present with us.

Believing is not always easy. In the Gospel today we heard that Thomas did not believe that Jesus had risen from the dead when he heard the news from his fellow apostles. He did not **see**. And therefore, he did not believe.

I have always found the story of Thomas to be fascinating. All of us can relate to it. Even in the life of a dedicated Christian, there are days when it is hard to believe. Hard to believe that God is a good and loving God. Hard to believe that Jesus cares about us.

Sometimes we might **wish** that we could **see** Jesus with our **own eyes** so that we can **believe** more **deeply**, more **strongly**.

At the end of this story, Jesus says something to Thomas and to you and me about this problem. He says:

Have you come to believe because you have seen me?

Blessed [HAPPY] are those who have not seen and have believed.

I always feel a little gleeful when I read this. Because....

Who is Jesus telling Thomas about with these words 2000 years ago? He is talking about **you** and **me**. **I** have **not** seen Jesus with **these eyes**. **You** have **not** seen Jesus with **your eyes**. But **I** believe in Jesus, and **you** believe in Jesus. And because of this, you and I are happy. We may not be happy in the way that the World thinks of things as happy.

Today's Gospel says that the first thing Jesus said to his disciples when he appeared to them on the evening of that first Easter was: "Peace be with you." This is Jesus's first gift to those who believe in him – peace of heart. This peace of heart, despite many unhappy things, is our happiness.

Many things in the world make us **not** happy: War, loneliness, discrimination, hatred, poverty, hard work with low wages, domestic violence, drugs, alcoholism, just to name a few. These are problems that many of us struggle with.

Jesus **gently invites** us to believe. He invites **Thomas** to have faith in him. He invites **you** and **me** to have **faith** in him.

And he **invites** us to **accept** his **gift** of **peace**.

The last words of today's Gospel make us a promise:

...these [things] are written that you may come to believe
that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

Today, we approach Jesus with faith.

We **do** believe in him. We believe he rose from the dead.

We believe that he is the Son of God.

We believe that he is with us now.

We know that our faith in him may not be perfect.

But let us ask him to **strengthen** our faith, to **support** our faith, to **guide** our faith, to **purify** our faith.

And to give us the gift of peace in the face of the many difficulties we may face in our lives.

He is there whether we can see Him or not.