

Homily: Second Sunday of Easter 2021

Today we hear of doubting Thomas, the apostle who for some reason was absent when Jesus appeared to the others on Easter Sunday evening, and who “refused to believe” in the Lord’s resurrection. And we also hear of believing Thomas, the same man, who, the following Sunday, saw the Lord with his own eyes and proclaimed that wonderfully clear expression of faith: “My Lord and my God”. When Jesus appeared to Thomas, He told Him to put his fingers in the holes made by the nails, and his hand in His side, and He said, “Doubt no longer, but believe.” And so doubting Thomas became a great believer; he received the gift of faith.

Last Sunday at Mass we renewed our baptismal promises, as we call them. Actually, for the most part, they’re not really promises at all: we don’t really promise to do something; instead, we proclaim that we believe. We profess that we, like Thomas, have received the gift of faith. And it truly is a gift. One of the most popular passages in the Gospel is the Beatitudes; Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for what is right”, and so on. But today’s Gospel also includes a beatitude. Jesus says “Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe.” He means us: we have not seen Him risen from the dead with our own eyes, but we have been given the gift of faith, and it is truly a great blessing to us.

Today’s readings spell out some of the ways in which faith is a blessing to us. St John says, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten by God”, in other words, become a child of God. In our baptism we were adopted as God’s children at that very moment when we were called to faith in the Lord. And there’s more: John also says that only the person who believes that Jesus is the Son of God can overcome the world. He writes, “This is victory over the world: our faith.” John often speaks of “the world” to mean all that is fallen, all that is selfish and self-serving, all that is opposed to God. Faith allows us to overcome these obstacles to love. In the first reading today, we hear that all the believers in the early Church were united in heart and soul, holding all things in common. It may seem like a far cry from our own way of living, yet it remains true that all of us who have faith in the risen Lord are called to unity, to communion in Him. We are given faith to draw us into the one Body of Christ, the Church, and to live as brothers and sisters of one another. And at the end of the Gospel, a further blessing from our faith is revealed: “These [things] are recorded,” John says, “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through His name.” Our faith, our belief in the risen Lord, offers us a new kind of life – the fullness of life which Jesus came to bring.

It's possible that we hear these promises and believe them, but somehow these blessings may seem to exist alongside our day-to-day lives, rather than being part of them. So I gave this a little thought, and asked myself: “How is my faith a blessing to me?” Here are the things I came up with, the things my faith has given me. Faith has made me a member of the Church, with all the joys this brings. Over the years I have met, and continue to meet, so many good people – not perfect people, but good people, people who strive, as I do, to be disciples of the risen Lord. I have learnt a great deal from them and experienced much

kindness through being part of the family of the Church. Alongside this, faith has brought me some deep, lasting and life-giving friendships. The faith my friends and I share has formed a great bond between us, and this is an enormous blessing in my life. My faith has helped me to better understand myself, to see myself as I really am – the good and the bad. We can only really know ourselves in relationship to others, and to know ourselves in relationship to God, the supreme Being, gives us the clearest picture of all. So, through faith I know myself better, and am able to grow in love through this self-knowledge and by God's grace. Faith has helped me to accept myself, with all my flaws and limitations, because I recognise that what really matters is to know myself as a child of God and to live in His light and His love. It has allowed me to experience forgiveness when I've needed it, that forgiveness which – as we hear today – is a gift of the risen Lord, given in the power of the Holy Spirit. Faith has helped me to find healing from past hurts. It has allowed me to find hope in times of suffering and strength in times of anxiety. It's given me consolation in times of grief. Faith has enabled me to live in a more loving and generous way (though, obviously, I'm still very much a work in progress!) Above all, it has allowed me to enter into relationship with God – the eternal, infinite God, who makes Himself known and available to me, whenever I turn to Him. And all these gifts are in this life! The greatest blessing of all, the gift of heaven, is, God willing, still to come for me.

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe”. I didn't have to think about it for too long to clearly see the truth of these words of Jesus in my own life. What a blessing faith is to me! So I encourage you to consider this too. It would be a great thing if, this week, every one of us could take a few minutes aside to think about how we experience the gift of faith as a blessing in our own lives. It may surprise you when you really think about it! And let's not stop there: let's notice, and then give thanks to God, for the great blessing, the great gift, which is our faith.

Fr Andrew

