

FR JUSTIN FORD, HOMILY, 2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER, 19TH APRIL 2020

‘Unless I see the holes that nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe.’ Those words of Thomas in the gospel reflect a certain attitude of mind we’ve probably come across. Perhaps sometimes, it’s been our own attitude. The habit of approaching the world with scepticism. Doubt, don’t believe. Don’t be gullible, don’t fall for the trap, don’t be taken in. I guess sometimes it comes from bitter experiences of having been let down in the past; and so we develop a suspicious personality, a fear of trusting.

Now, there’s certainly something to be said for approaching the world in a *rational* way. A general attitude of *proportioning* our belief to the *evidence*. Reason is one of God’s gifts for leading us to truth. It’s reason that sets human beings apart from the animals. But proportioning our belief to the evidence means being *open* to evidence, open to truth, open to being convinced. So: sometimes scepticism about something is the rational thing, when the evidence simply isn’t there. We don’t just believe any old thing. But if someone gets to the point where their reaction in life is *always* scepticism and doubt – if scepticism and doubt are someone’s fallback attitude, they can start closing their eyes to the evidence that actually *is* there. No evidence is enough for them anymore. They’re so scared of believing something *false*, of being taken in, they miss out on believing a whole lot of things that they really should realise are actually true.

Sometimes as well, there’s the danger that can be linked with scepticism, with refusing to believe, and that’s when we want to feel superior to people who aren’t so sceptical, aren’t so doubting of the world. That’s when a kind of sneering attitude can come in. A cynical approach. There’s a great definition of cynicism given by the playwright Oscar Wilde. A cynic, he said, is someone who knows the *price* of everything, and the *value* of nothing. Someone who knows the price of everything, but the value of nothing. Always focusing on the negative, on the drawbacks to something.

So, how does all this apply to Thomas in the gospel? Well really, he already had plenty of evidence for the resurrection, in the testimony of all the other disciples who’d already encountered the Risen Lord. And Thomas already knew from the whole ministry of Jesus that this wasn’t any random person these claims were being made about. This was a man who Thomas *knew* did amazing things, who *could* work miracles, who acted with divine power. So with that already in the background, did he really think all the other disciples were all just making it up, or having delusions?

There’s a sort of exaggerated individualism that won’t accept the testimony of others. So Thomas says, ‘Unless *I* see the holes that the nails made, and can put *my* finger into the holes they made.’ In other words, ‘I won’t believe what *you* tell me, I have to see for myself. All of *you* are so gullible or stupid. *I’m* the only one who can properly assess the evidence.’ So: there can be a certain pride there as well, that closes us to truth. Really, we should be open to learning from others.

St John Paul II, in his great encyclical letter on Faith and Reason, *Fides et Ratio*, said that the human being can be defined as the one who seeks the truth. We want to know the way things really are. And above all, the truth about the meaning of life. Why are we here? How are we meant to live?

But then he added to that: the human being, the one who seeks the truth, is also the one who lives by *belief*. So much of what we know about the world, we simply have to believe others. Even an

expert in one field can't be an expert in all the other fields. No one can rebuild the whole structure of human knowledge all by themselves. So it's in human nature to know things, not just as isolated individuals, but in community. The human being is one who lives by belief. Trusting in what others have told us. And that brings in personal relationship as well.

And then Pope John Paul showed how Christian faith answers both the needs. We're searching for the truth, especially the truth about the meaning of life. And we're looking for a person to whom we can entrust ourselves. Christian faith comes to meet us, because we're invited to entrust ourselves to Christ, and to learn from him the meaning of life.

And God doesn't just leave us to place our faith in Christ for no reason. He's made us as rational beings, so he's actually given us plenty of evidence to lead us to faith. I've spoken about that in the past – the reasons for faith. But in the end, the reasons for faith are there to help lead us to step *beyond* reason. So: if we *close our eyes* to reason, we're not acting in a fully human way; but then we can't *stay* just at the level of reason. All the reasons for faith tell us: reason by itself isn't enough. We need to let ourselves be lifted by grace into the act of complete trust, complete faith. Where we say to God, I believe it completely, not because I've worked it all out for myself, but because you have said it, and your word is true.

To go beyond what we can see for ourselves, into trust. That's the faith which is the seed of eternal life. Jesus tells us, happy are those who have not seen, and yet believe. To have that fundamental trust – that's the invitation which is still addressed to us today. To receive the testimony which has been passed down to us, to hear from the scriptures the signs that Jesus worked, and then to step outside our own perspective into the perspective of absolute faith and trust in God. In the words of St John in our Gospel: "These [things] are recorded 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."