

April 11, 2010
Second Sunday After Easter
Seminarian Matthew Stuhlmuller

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT

No doubt about it...How many times have we heard that phrase? It's a statement of absolute certainty that we like to just casually throw out. It gives us and others confidence. Are you coming to the party this weekend, your friend might ask you? No doubt about it! Or your boss might ask you if you can complete a project..."No doubt about it!" you reply. However, life's rarely that certain.

If we're honest with ourselves, life is full of doubt and uncertainty. Our doubts seem to be far-ranging. We might doubt in the goodness of God when random acts of violence occur, like the mine explosion in West Virginia. How could a loving and gracious God let such terrible acts occur? Or we might find ourselves identifying with many of the basic tenets of religion but doubting the overall need or effectiveness of organized religion, labeling ourselves as spiritual but not religious. Why join an organization when it's failed so many times in the past? Or we might doubt aspects of our everyday lives. Will I ever find a job? Will I ever be able to pay my bills? Will I ever be healthy again?

In the face of such doubt, such uncertainty, no wonder we want to take control when we can and proclaim, "No doubt about it!" We seem to function better when we're able to eliminate the element of the unknown from our lives. But should that be our goal, that we would have no doubt, that all of life's questions would be answered neatly and succinctly?

Certainly some people are looking for just that. Think about the rapid growth of certain churches that provide all the answers for their parishioners. Some churches portray Christianity as a comprehensive worldview by which we can have no doubt about it. This can seem comforting at first, but is it actually realistic that we'll ever be able to eliminate all doubt from our minds? That's pretty doubtful. But if we explore this a little bit deeper, why would we want to eliminate all doubt? If you think about it, the elimination of doubt would eliminate the need for faith. We would no longer have to trust in a higher power if all of life's uncertainties were removed.

Faith and doubt actually go hand-in-hand with each other. A famous theologian quipped, "Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith." Ants in the pants...let me explain. Doubt doesn't destroy faith; rather, doubt keeps faith alive and moving. Mother Teresa is a good example of this. A couple of years ago, her personal letters were released. Working in the suffering streets of Calcutta, she had deep doubts about the existence of God and whether her life's work had meaning, but along with her ever-present doubt, she maintained an abiding hope in the existence of God. She showed that Christianity is not about having a "no doubt about it" attitude.

This intersection between faith and doubt, that's where we find Thomas in today's gospel reading. Thomas' doubt leads him on a journey of questioning, a journey to discover who the risen Christ is. Jesus was dead but is now alive; certainly the meaning of the resurrection is not a concept that can just be grasped overnight. Thomas' doubt, and his search for answers, led him to profound faith. We often paint Thomas as the doubter, the man who wouldn't believe, but Thomas ends us calling Jesus "my Lord and my God." That's one of the strongest confessions of faith in all of Scripture.

I think we find ourselves in the same position as Thomas. The Easter season is our time to begin a new journey of discovering who the risen Christ is, what the risen Christ means for our lives. In such simple acts as washing with water and feasting on bread and wine, we experience the goodness of God amidst life's doubts. Jesus comes among us and offers the same words that he gave to the disciples, "Peace be with you." Every time that we share the Eucharist, every time that we have a baptism, it's as if Jesus breathes upon us and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Thomas experienced the presence of the risen Christ; we also experience the presence of Christ in this place. We may not be led to exclaim, "No doubt about it!", as if these rituals remove all doubt from our lives, but we can attest that we have experienced divine grace and mercy.

Jesus tells Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." It's insightful if you read Jesus' statement in the original Greek. The words doubt and belief come from the exact same word, *pistos*. To believe is to have *pistos*; to doubt is to have *apistos*. The two concepts are fundamentally related. I like to think of them as complementary, two sides of the same coin. We can't have one without the other.

Holy Trinity understands this search for answers as a central component of its identity. The church's identity statement says that this is a community with an "openness to questioning." That's a profound witness to a world in which many churches ask us to stop questioning, to pretend that we have no doubts. In this place, we're welcome to ask the tough questions, just as Thomas did.

We do have to remember that even with this search for truth, it's still doubtful that we'll ever be able to resolve all of our uncertainties about God, religion, and life, but can we still have an active, vibrant faith, even with our remaining doubts? No doubt about it.