

Second Sunday of Easter

April 7, 2024

“For the love of God is this, that we keep his commandments.”

Every year on this Sunday we hear the exact same passage from St. John’s Gospel, the story about Jesus’ appearance to Thomas. Of course, it’s a very familiar one to most of us. On top of that it provides a lot of good source material for clergy to preach on. And many preachers often choose to focus on the nature of belief, what it is, how we come to it and those sorts of things.

And it’s important stuff. Truly. After all it’s the very first line of the Creed we profess every Sunday. Week after week we stand together and declare and re-affirm our belief in God. Of course, just saying the words doesn’t “mean” that we necessarily believe. Nor does it mean that we all agree on what that word “believe” means. To “believe in God” is not something that can be described, explained, or understood very easily. It is a deep mystery that goes way beyond the limits of our language and probably our intellect.

But it’s tremendously important. And the fact that we will never understand it completely doesn’t mean we shouldn’t reflect on and contemplate what it means to believe. That’s probably why the Church asks us to read this passage year after year. Now, as you well know, for the Christian, belief in God means belief in God the Father, belief in God the Son, and belief in God the Holy Spirit. Yet, there’s only one God, another tenet of our faith that cannot be “explained away” through some sort of complicated theological gymnastics. Our Triune God is also a deep mystery.

I guess we could say that belief in God in its most simplest form is the acceptance that something or someone is behind everything we see and everything we experience. It’s the kind of belief that comes about when people reflect on the world around them and conclude that existence can’t

be some sort of “accident”, that something way beyond themselves must be “responsible” for its very existence. And quite honestly, many people who don’t accept any sort of “system” of belief or any faith tradition do often believe at least in this sort of way. It’s akin to saying, “Well, I don’t really know who God is or even what God expects of me but I do believe there is a God and I do believe in a power beyond myself responsible for all of creation (what we can see and even what we can’t).” And we should never be dismissive of anyone who expresses belief in God in this way. It’s the same God, the same voice speaking to them as speaking to us, the same God gifting them with faith who gifts us with faith.

And yet, whether we believe in God in a simple way or a more complicated way, or to come to believe in God in an effortless way or only after much soul-searching, understand God in a confident way or in a way that’s accompanied by serious doubts, it doesn’t really demand that much from us. At least on the surface it doesn’t. I can look around the world, think “Okay, someone must have made all of this,” and then go back to whatever I was doing before. My “belief” doesn’t have to make me live any certain way if I don’t want it to, unless if “believing” isn’t quite as simple as I’ve made it out to be.

My dear friends, we may say with relative ease, “I believe in God”, but underneath those simple words is something more profound, more personal, more demanding. You see, our faith invites us to take the next step, to expand what it means to believe. And we do that by not just “believing” in our God, but by also embracing and accepting a much deeper kind of commitment. For when we Catholics say that we believe we are also saying that. . . I love the God I believe in. And that’s something different altogether.

“For the love of God is this, that we keep his commandments.”

That’s when our belief in God leads to challenges. That’s when our belief in God leads to serious responsibilities. That’s when our belief in God leads to action on our part and our response to a God who has shown us

how much he loves us, and how merciful he is to us, and how generous he is with us, and how understanding and compassionate he is with us. And it is this profound realization of how incredible our God is, revealed perfectly in the person of Jesus, that becomes the catalyst for all we say and all we do. It's what enabled those early disciples (through the power of the Spirit) to not simply remain behind locked doors and "think about" who this Jesus was. Rather, it was their deep faith and desire to return love for love that gave them the courage to put into practice the love Jesus had showed them. And the world was never the same again.

Of course, when we hear that we are to keep God's commandments we must be careful to not simply hear that as just "keeping the Ten Commandments", even though that is immeasurably important. But keeping God's commandments, it also means listening to that voice within, listening to our God who whispers to us in the recesses of our hearts, helping us form our consciences and understand a little more clearly right from wrong (with the Church's help of course). That's the fullest sense of what it means to believe. May we join our voices with Thomas and acknowledge Jesus as Lord and God. But let's not let our belief end there. Let's step out as the disciples did sharing God's great love and demonstrating the depth of our belief through countless acts of goodness, kindness, mercy, and love.

To conclude please let me remind ourselves that today is Divine Mercy Sunday, the Second Sunday of the Easter season. Divine Mercy Sunday was named by Pope John Paul II at the canonization of St. Maria Faustina on April 30, 2000, and then officially decreed by the Vatican. Divine Mercy Sunday can be seen as the convergence of all the mysteries and graces of Holy Week and Easter Week. The feast focuses the light of the Risen Christ into a radiant beam of merciful love and grace for the whole world. In his revelations to St. Faustina, Jesus expressed His desire to celebrate this special feast. He says that the Feast of Mercy emerged from his very depths of tenderness and mankind will not have peace until it turns to the Fount of his Mercy. Jesus says that the divine floodgates through which grace flow are opened and let no soul fear to draw near to him, even

though his sins be as scarlet because the Feast of Mercy emerged from the very depths of his tenderness.

May I recommend that you add Divine Mercy Chaplet to your sets of prayers for I believe that when prayer becomes your habit miracles become your lifestyle.

My dear friends, as we fix our gaze on the face of the Risen Christ let us make our own the trusting prayer of abandonment of Sr. Faustina, and say with firm hope: Christ Jesus, I trust in you!