

Homily for April 11, 2010 (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday)  
*Acts 5:12-16, Ps. 118 (vv), Rev. 1:9-11, 12-13,17-19; John 20:19-31*

We've all heard the expression that "seeing is believing." Very often it is uttered as a manifestation of distrust, particularly after broken promises and dashed expectations. One spouse cheats on another and promises to be faithful. The cuckolded spouse says, "Seeing is believing." The leader of one particular party encourages the support of a particular piece of legislation by claiming that it will actually lower the government's deficit. The leader of the rival party responds, "Seeing is believing." In today's gospel reading, the disciples who witnessed the risen Lord proclaimed to Thomas that the one crucified was now alive. His response was, "Well, seeing is believing."

Today's scripture readings, however, invite us to turn that expression of skepticism on its head and to also recognize that *believing is seeing!* That is, if we are able to view our world and experiences through the eyes of faith, we may be able to see something entirely different than most people allow themselves to see.

John found himself exiled to the Greek island of Patmos, a late first century CE Roman penal colony during what most scripture scholars say was the reign of the emperor Domitian. His physical eyes may only have been able to behold a place of isolation and punishment for his refusal to offer sacrifices to the Roman gods and the emperor himself.

But because he came to the island with the eyes of faith—a faith that he wanted to instill and nurture in the early church—he was able to behold a vision that began with a vision of the risen Christ, assuring him, "Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, the one who lives. Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever."

That vision, which John was commanded to write down, became the basis for the Book of Revelation—one of the most read (and least understood) books of the Bible—which helped to encourage and sustain the early church through some very trying times. Ultimately, not even the force of an empire could destroy it.

When the apostles were reported first to have cured people, they were typically greeted with doubt, fear and persecution. The passage from

Acts 5 in today's first reading followed several other dramatic ones in which Peter and James cured a crippled beggar in the name of Jesus (3:1-10), which led them to be persecuted by the elders and scribes (4:1-22). Meanwhile, the love, trust and unity of the nascent church in Jerusalem (4:32-37) buoyed their faith.

Yet while "none of the others" (that is, the disciples beyond the apostles) "dared to join" the apostles as they boldly continued their ministry of teaching and healing, "the people esteemed them." Further, news of the healings drew people not only from Jerusalem but also from the surrounding towns and villages. These people had not seen what the apostles had done, they had only heard about it. But they believed...or at least they wanted to believe; and their faith was rewarded.

We can imagine that Thomas wanted to believe, too. After all, he was one of the twelve whom Jesus himself had chosen. But he couldn't bring himself to it without seeing first. Perhaps the trauma of the Lord's passion and death was too overwhelming. After investing so much of himself and his faith in following Jesus and hoping that he was the Messiah, it must have been a crushing and demoralizing blow to have it all seemingly end in the pain and humiliation of the cross.

It would not be surprising if Thomas felt not only a sense of deep personal loss and disappointment but even disillusionment and betrayal. Whatever his feelings, he wasn't willing to trust anything but his own eyes.

What he failed to remember, however, is that our human sight is limited. We can't see everything, everywhere, all the time. In fact, sometimes our eyes can deceive us. This is particularly true when our vision is clouded or narrowed by things like loss, confusion, or prejudice. We choose what we will see in the mistaken belief that it will somehow insulate us from the pain of seeing more. Sometimes it can...for a while.

But life has a way of crowding itself into our field of vision. Like Jesus, people and things step in front of us even when we have locked the doors, and we are forced to put our hands into the nail prints and lanced sides that we have tried so hard to avoid.

Lord Jesus, in your mercy deepen our faith! In a world where "seeing is believing," open our eyes to also understand that "believing is seeing." +