

2nd SUNDAY OF EASTER, Cycle C

Acts 5: 12-16 + Ps 118: 2-4, 13-15, 22-24 + Rev. 1: 9-11a, 12-13, 17-19 + Jn. 20: 19-31
Holy Spirit Catholic Church: April 28, 2019

The evangelist John uses the verb “believe” nearly 100 times in his Gospel. This is much more than the other three evangelists use this word. Interestingly, John never uses the noun “belief” nor the noun “faith.”

Now if you were listening closely to the deacon proclaim the Gospel, you may have heard the word “belief” in the very last verse—so that through this belief.” However, the more exact translation, closer to the meaning of the original Greek, is “believing” -- “*so that through believing you may have life in his name.*” (20: 31b)

Why does John use the verb “believe” instead of the noun “belief” or the noun “faith”? Because for the 4th Evangelist, faith is a verb, faith is an activity, an ever active relationship with God in the present.

It is very important to understand this distinction, because for the Gospel writers, especially for John, faith is not a noun, it is not something “we have” or “don’t have” or “have only so much of.”

Rather, it is a verb, implying an active relationship with the Lord of Life, Jesus Christ. Therefore, it’s not something we “get”.

We don’t “store up” faith, but we grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ. As we know him and experience his love for us, we come to believe in Him.

It helps to understand the core meaning of the Greek word for “*to believe.*”

This word is “*pistouen*” and it means, “*to give one’s heart to.*”

So, when we say we believe in the Lord Jesus, we are not thinking certain “truths” about him and mentally consenting to those truths, but rather

we are in a living, dynamic relationship with the Crucified now Risen Lord.

Each day, in our journey of faith, we are growing in love of him as we receive more fully his love for us.

Each day we are invited by him to give our heart more fully to him, especially the broken parts of our heart, the dark secrets of our heart.

The whole Gospel of John builds toward a crescendo at the end of the Gospel in Chapter 20, where Jesus encourages Thomas to not be unbelieving, but believe.

The invitation from Jesus---give yourself totally to me in trust, Thomas.

Touch my wounds and believe that I live,

that death cannot destroy the loving relationship I have with you.

So that through your believing Thomas, others might believe in Jesus Risen and living.

Since this is such an important concept (“to believe”), and since John uses this verb almost 100 times, it would be helpful to examine other examples of its use. We want to know what the Risen Lord is inviting us to do with Thomas, how to stop being unbelieving and to believe.

Everyone Jesus encounters he invites into a life-giving relationship with him. He invites them to believe in him, to give their hearts to him, and this happens over and over again throughout the 4th Gospel. In Chapter 3, Nicodemus, the Pharisee, comes at night to be taught by Jesus, to engage Jesus in conversation.

Jesus shares with Nicodemus the heart of his message in one of the most famous verses in all the Sacred Scriptures:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

Then there is the Samaritan Woman in Chapter 4, who encounters Jesus at Jacob’s well. Jesus thirsts for her to enter into a relationship with him, to drink the living water of the Spirit which he longs to give her.

When she does, she runs back to share the Good News of Jesus’ merciful love with the people of her town, who had condemned her because of her many failed marriages. The Samaritans in her town come to believe in Jesus, first because of her testimony, but then as they go out to encounter Jesus by Jacob’s well, they come to *believe* because of Jesus’ word.

Then in Chapter 9 the man born blind is healed of his physical blindness by Jesus. He grows in his relationship with Jesus, as he begins “to see” who Jesus truly is. At the end of this story, as the man born blind now seeing is tossed out of the synagogue by the religious leaders, Jesus comes upon him and asks him a question.

“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

(Son of Man is one of the most important titles for Jesus in John’s Gospel.)

He responds: *“Lord, I believe, and he worshipped Jesus.”* (9: 35-38)

Martha encounters Jesus on the road to her brother, Lazarus’ tomb, and she at first questions why Jesus did not come before her brother died, but then expresses how deeply she believes in Jesus.

“Jesus says to Martha: ‘I am the Resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’”

Martha’s reply: *“Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”* (11: 25-27)

But it's not only Martha who enters more deeply into an active, dynamic relationship with Jesus as the Lord of Life, but also some in the crowd who witness Jesus calling Lazarus forth from his tomb.

“Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done.”

This “reporting” leads to a meeting where the religious leaders plot to kill Jesus. So, some in the crowd believe in Jesus and entrust their hearts to him, while others’ hearts are hardened and, instead of entrusting their lives into his care, they become partly responsible for his death.

Open hearts vs. closed hearts—it is the story of the Scriptures and of the 2000 year history of Christianity.

Engaging with Jesus, coming to know him as a real, living person, leads to a relationship with him that is growing and active.

Which can mean, as it was with Thomas, that doubts can surface at times, which can lead to a stronger relationship with Jesus, because he can handle our questions.

It was this way with Martha, who makes the 2nd strongest profession of faith in John’s Gospel, second only to Thomas.

Thomas’ doubts, his questioning and searching, lead him to give the strongest profession of faith in all of John’s Gospel: *“My Lord and my God.”* (20:28)

For doubt is not the opposite of faith. Believing in nothing is the opposite of faith. Amazement is also the opposite of faith, because those who are amazed in the Gospels stand at a distance from Jesus; instead of entering into a relationship with Him, they get all caught up in the mighty deeds.

When we give our hearts and our very lives to Jesus, when we believe in him and daily enter more deeply into a living relationship with him, like Thomas did for 3 years, then we realize we do not have all the answers. And that’s okay. We are not expected to have all the answers, because then there would be no reason to believe in Jesus.

With Thomas, building on our trust in the Risen One, we can risk not knowing all the answers or having everything neat and tidy. With Thomas, as we reach out to touch the Risen Lord, our hearts are filled with wonder and awe in His presence. But we do not see the Risen Lord in the same way that Thomas did, which is why Jesus says we are especially blessed:

“Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.” (John 20: 29b)

So how do we touch the Crucified and Risen Lord today?
How do we touch the Lord of Life who still has his wounds, the marks of his love?
By reaching out to touch his Body broken and given to us in Holy Communion,
by allowing him to touch us as we drink His Blood.
We may not completely understand how the Risen Lord can be truly present to us
in blessed bread and wine, but he is.

Peter helps us, by inviting us to believe in the Lord's teaching about the Eucharist
and trust that we who eat his flesh and drink his blood have life in him.
At the end of Chapter 6 in John's Gospel, after Jesus' teaching on the absolute necessity
of his followers to eat his flesh and drink his blood, many of his disciples leave him.
They choose not to believe in him; they will not surrender their lives into his care.
So, Jesus asks the twelve, "*Do you also want to go away?*"
Simon Peter answered him, *'Lord, to whom can we go?*
You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know
that you are the Holy One of God.'" (6:67-69)

Thus, when we come forward to receive the Holy One of God in Communion,
we are actually entrusting our lives to him.
As we say, AMEN to the words "Body of Christ" we are not only receiving
His Risen Body into ours, but we are giving our wounded bodies and hearts to him.

It is in this Holy Union with Him that we are transformed and are strengthened
to believe in Him;
to give our lives more fully to Him every days as we reach out to touch with compassion
his wounded body living in those around us.

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi