

[Readings: Deut. 4:32-34, 39-40; Psalm 33; Romans 8:14-17; Matt. 28:16-20]

Do you have a favorite Bible verse or Bible story?

Certain verses in scripture make our hearts leap up and stand at attention, though perhaps for different reasons. Sometimes we are attracted to the excitement in the exclamations: "Let there be light!" "A child is born for us!" "He is risen; he is not here!" Other lines thrill us with their mystery: "I shall let my beauty pass before you, but my face you cannot see." "His face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light." Sometimes it's the questions that move us, because they are also our questions: "Lord, will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty?" "How long, Lord, will you hide your face from me?" "Lord, to whom can we go?" But often it's the humanity of the statements in a holy text that astonish us with their bald honesty: "Cursed be the day that I was born!" Or the ache in the brevity: "And Jesus wept."

One verse that always gets my attention is this funny sentence near the end of Matthew's gospel that we hear today: "When they all saw Jesus, they worshiped, but they doubted." It's awkward, and comical in its contradictions. But it offers a most comforting and endearing image of what discipleship looks like under even the best possible conditions. In the midst of an act of worship, the 11 closest friends Jesus ever had doubted him. And this is after three years of teaching, healing, miracles, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. Christ the Lord is standing right in front of them, right before their eyes. And they worship Him. And they doubt. Such is the richness of our humanity!

Shouldn't the 11 remaining apostles be levitating with Easter certainty? Shouldn't they be standing on the mountaintop with Jesus halfway to transfiguration themselves in the presence of His risen glory?

Evidently faith doesn't work that way. The disciples reserve a corner of doubt in the dynamic exercising of their faith. They have rushed to Galilee to meet Jesus, even as they doubt the likelihood of such an encounter. They bow reverently, all the while disbelieving their own experience.

And we know what this is. We call it "hoping against hope." We want what cannot be. We acknowledge the futility of our longing and continue to want it. In a sense, this is the only real definition of faith, to long for what cannot logically be. If something is obviously and inevitably coming our way, it doesn't take faith to wait for it, just patience.

Faith is reaching for the improbable and then graduating to the impossible. If resurrection from the dead and virgin birth and miraculous healing were rationally comprehensible events, we wouldn't have to believe them. We'd just read about them in the papers.

In our First Reading, Moses makes a curious argument in telling the people to pledge themselves to their one true God. Moses appeals to God's singularity: not just that God is "one," but that God is unique. What Israel's God does, no other god can do. Their God not only made the world but makes history with every act of divine will.

We're with Moses on this one. Our God is a singular God whose signature act, from the Christian perspective, is the Incarnation. Since the Council of Nicaea, Christianity has confirmed that God became human so that humanity might share in divinity. Our Eucharist is an invitation to that shared life. The indwelling Spirit is one more sign of that incorporation. God is in us, and we are in God. We believe this. Fervently. And we doubt this. Routinely. The latest polls suggest that only one third of us practicing Catholics who come to church every Sunday really believe that Jesus Christ is present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist. We worship, but we doubt. Sometimes.

It's ironic to consider on the solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity that God is a perfectly integrated One-in-Three, and we can barely keep our singular selves together in one place for a quarter of an hour. The integrity of the Divine Will is mutually shared by Father, Son, and Spirit. And we seek to follow that Divine Will in our daily living.

What role does doubt play in your life? What builds up your faith? How?

How do you bring in new members into the Church and help to form them?

In today's Gospel, Jesus hands over the Great Commission in one smooth sentence: "Go, make disciples, baptize, and teach." We'd like to think the disciples might have been finished with their doubting, but chances are they weren't. So now they carry the double burden of presenting the Gospel to the whole world and having private reservations about the whole experience. So do we. But thankfully, Jesus doesn't just hand off the mission. He also adds my all-time favorite final clause: "And behold, I am with you always." This puts the last sentence into perspective. Jesus knows that our divided nature is not going to go away. We'll keep on dragging our doubts into our worship. But happily, the reverse is true. Wherever doubt takes us, our faith won't be far behind. AMEN!