

2nd SUNDAY OF EASTER – C (April 24, 2022)

I recently read an article about a new approach used by some atheists and nonbelievers to promote their ideas; it centers on the phrase “thinking is hard”. The premise: we who believe in God and that Jesus really rose from the dead—we believe such things and the rest of our Christian faith only because we want to be told what to believe. These nonbelievers say we don’t want to think too much for ourselves about such things because, again: “thinking is hard”. In their minds, if we just use our own brains and look at things logically and scientifically, we would realize that no genuinely thinking, rational person could possibly believe in God or that Jesus rose from the dead.

That article came to mind for me with today’s gospel, especially regarding ‘doubting Thomas’. He wasn’t there the first time the risen Christ appeared to the other apostles, and he refused to believe what they told him. Maybe he thought that thinking was too hard for them—they so wanted to believe Jesus rose from the dead that they didn’t want to do the hard work of thinking and realizing that dead people simply do not come back to life. Of course, Thomas saw for himself a week later that Jesus truly had risen. Thinking was no longer hard for him because he saw the risen Christ with his own eyes and heard him with his own ears. His doubts were gone completely and forever.

So, 2000 years later, does it make sense for us to believe this seemingly unbelievable claim that Jesus really rose from the dead? Can a thinking, logical, intelligent person conclude that Jesus is truly alive? Or is it only make-believe and we refuse to accept that blunt reality because “thinking is hard”? I’m glad to report to you that it makes total sense to believe Jesus truly rose from the dead; in fact, believing in his resurrection is the strongest possible rational and reasonable conclusion that a thinking person could come to after examining the evidence. Of course, we have to remember that faith is essential in these matters and that faith is first of all a gift from God. But God also gave each of us a brain and the ability to think, to reason, and to make rational conclusions based on the evidence that we have.

One of the earliest attempts to disprove the resurrection was to say that Jesus’ dead body was taken from the tomb by his disciples—that was the only reason the tomb was empty. In fact, we find this very claim made in the last chapter of Matthew’s gospel—the chief priests and elders bribed those guarding Jesus’ tomb and told them to hand on the ‘stolen body’ story. But that proves nothing. First, it ignores the facts that the tomb was guarded by armed soldiers and that a huge and enormously heavy stone was placed over the tomb’s entrance. It makes no sense to say the apostles could have overcome those obstacles without the guards knowing about it. Besides, the fact remains that there were many persons—the apostles and others—who saw and heard the risen Jesus and even touched his resurrected body. The tomb was empty because Jesus rose from the dead. It really is as simple as that; a genuinely thinking person could easily and sensibly conclude as much.

Then there are those who argue that the apostles only imagined they saw the risen Jesus or that they only saw a ghost. That is what the apostles themselves thought at first, and they were scared out of their wits. But this was no mere ghost or hallucination—this was instead the risen Jesus in his glorified yet very physical and tangible body. Jesus invited Thomas to touch the

wounds in his hands and side. He ate a piece of baked fish in the presence of his astonished apostles. A thinking person would know that ghosts and hallucinations cannot eat fish or anything else!

The last main argument still attempted by the doubters of our time is that Jesus' followers simply made up the story of his resurrection, that it is only a myth. I believe this is their weakest argument of all, and a little reason and thinking demonstrates this. Why would the apostles have made up such a story? What would have been their motive; what would that have accomplished? If Jesus had not risen from the dead, it would have been the easiest thing in the world for their opponents to produce his dead body and thus prove the apostles were lying. On top of that, remember what happened to those earliest disciples. Not only did those first preachers of the risen Christ face rejection and ridicule, but many of them also faced torture and hideously painful deaths...because they refused to stop talking about the risen Christ. Who in their right minds would be willing to undergo such suffering for the sake of something they knew to be a lie? That makes no sense whatsoever; it is literally nonsense!

A few years ago a man by the name of Lee Strobel wrote a book called "The Case for Christ". He was a religious skeptic; when his wife became a Christian, he got very angry and determined to disprove once and for all the claims of Christianity, particularly the divinity of Jesus and the historical reality of his resurrection. The more he probed and investigated, however; the more he thought about all the evidence he found, the more skeptical he became about his own skepticism. And so he himself became a Christian because that is where his reason and his thinking led him—aided, of course, by the Holy Spirit. It's a fascinating book that covers this and a lot of other related issues; for example, why the gospel accounts are reliable and trustworthy. I highly recommend it; I'll have the details in next weekend's bulletin.

Here is what Strobel concluded regarding Jesus' resurrection: "While most people can only have faith that their beliefs are true, the disciples were in a position to know without a doubt whether or not Jesus had risen from the dead. They claimed that they saw him, talked with him, and ate with him. If they weren't absolutely certain, they wouldn't have allowed themselves to be tortured to death for proclaiming that the Resurrection had happened."

Kind of hard to argue against that, isn't it? That is precisely the point. Yes, sometimes thinking is hard, especially if you don't want to face evidence and facts that force you to question your own opinions or presuppositions. Lee Strobel and many others like him—including many brilliant scientists and other professionals—have grappled with lots of solid evidence and arguments that led them to think and conclude that Jesus is real and that he truly did rise from the dead. That reality, that 'thinking-person's' truth is what gives us the hope, the confidence and the joy we need to handle whatever challenges life throws at us on any and all levels. All praise, glory and honor to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, risen from the dead—now and always and forever and ever. Amen!