

## *And he saw, and believed*

Homily, 1st April 2018 – Easter

John 20,1-9

father G. Paparone o.p.

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*Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.*

### **What did he see, and what did he believe?**

This is the core of our faith.

“Saw” may be referred to the empty tomb as well as the composition of the well set strips of linen. Indeed, if we compare this scene to Lazarus’ resurrection, he was blinded when he came out from his tomb, here the strips of linen are inside the tomb and are not just dropped randomly, they are well folded.

Yet, apart from this digression, I wish to offer you the essential thought about our faith, which is simply manifested through these two little words: “**he saw and believed**”.

**Believed** what they doubted before, which they could not understand before, as St. John points out: *They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.*

Yet, we can ask ourselves: how come these people who were the chosen ones, so special to be chosen by Jesus one by one and for three whole years exposed to his teachings, had not yet understood it?

This is a pinch of mystery and drama in our lives: we have hard time to understand.

Today, we are here to celebrate Easter: have we actually understood what we are going through and celebrate?

What is our understanding of Easter and Christianity?

Each one of us sees it in our peculiar way, often implicitly and also with a very elaborate vision of it that may be the outcome of many variables: one’s parents, the social arena, clergy we might have met, our readings, our cultural background...

Indeed, we may now understand things that most likely some couple of hundreds of years ago mankind could not even grasp, we have needs that mankind did not have 200 years ago, and so on and so forth going back in time.

Not understanding is a steady line throughout the whole *History of Salvation*.

The Scriptures constantly rebuke the fact that one finds it hard to understand.

This trouble in understanding remains also when we have a good disposition and will to understand; otherwise, one would not understand the many variables having to do with interpretation, philosophy, society, politics and science.

We must be aware that our intelligence is limited and we have most troubles when understanding has a direct bearing with living.

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If we do not wish to change our way of living; then, not only we do not understand why we are subject to limitations, but we do not understand because we do not want to understand.

As the saying goes: “There is none so deaf as those who do not want to hear”.

**Hearing the word of God, which means actually understand it, means revolutionize our life.**

If you understand fully the word of God, your life can no longer be the same.

The evening before last, we have watched a movie which I quoted also last night, titled “Resurrected”, and I invite you to watch it.

The leading character, a Roman tribune was involved into this Jewish religious drama, and after having carried out his investigation on the disappearance of Jesus’ body from his tomb, eventually understands that the man he came across was resurrected Jesus, and says: now I know that my life can no longer be as it used to.

**Believing means understanding who is Jesus and what he has done.**

The approach to studying the scriptures and catechism, as well as those instruments used to introduce children to having faith, is focused on doctrine; yet, our faith does not mean agree upon and share into a doctrine: **our faith is based on an historical event, or rather, on one person.**

A person who lived and died.

The doctrine is simply a way, our need, since we are rational creatures, to turn what Jesus said and did into a system to organise it all in comparison with other frames of mind.

Yet, our subscription to the faith can only occur through one person.

St. Peter, in his sermon at Pentecost, which we read earlier on as a first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, reminds us all that: *But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them...*

We are at the beginning of the life of the Church, approximately two months after Jesus’ resurrection.

Peter addresses all the people in Jerusalem, his fellow citizens, who saw Jesus and as later described in the Book of the Acts, says: *You yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.* (Acts 10,37-38)

**This is faith!**

**Believing that a Man existed – Jesus from Nazareth – who was here healing, granting good, freeing people from the devil, their sins, and evil, ignorance, nonsense, existential emptiness and giving them a different perspective and life: be able to live as the God’s children.**

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Christianity is not a philosophical or theological thought. In absolute terms, it is not even a religion, if we entrust religion with an academic meaning, like the whole set of things you need to believe in God.

A great scholar has interpreted at the beginning of one of his books all this through a comparison: you see, the other religions and systems of thought live over and beyond their founders.

**Christianity is unthinkable and impossible without a relationship with God.**

We may sum it all up by saying that Christianity is **living Jesus**.

It groups all those who are united, connected with Jesus and live their lives with him. One cannot split the life of Jesus from that of the Christians. **There is only one life: our life in God.** Since we are the *Mystical Body of Jesus*.

Our life away from God bears no meaning.

**Therefore, Jesus is the founder and the foundation**, and is the perennial and daily possibility to be Christians.

If we understand that our life as believers means living with Christ, then we set our life as a path of liberation from the sin, evil and an existential journey that leads us to the *Kingdom of Heaven*. Through this path, we already can live there, since we are already part of it being born again in Christ.

In the second reading (Col 3,1-4), it is said: “*If then you have been raised with Christ*” and this means that Christians are those people who resurrected!

Is it like the one who resurrected? We are here, do you think that we are resurrected?

You may say no; I say **yes!**

**You are resurrected if, for example, you love your enemies, and you are resurrected if at the core of your life, you have the *Kingdom of God* and not just the wellbeing in the world.**

**This is the meaning of Baptism.** It is not just a lay celebration, not an initiation to other truths, like in other cultures, it is not an act through which one is introduced into a society.

All cultures have initiation ceremonies to be admitted into a society; yet, **Baptism means become embodied into Christ and resurrect to a new life**, since Baptism means and involves the decision taken not to follow evil anymore, pursuing good and therefore resurrect.

Can you imagine if all Catholics in the world would live like this? Would we have this society?

If all the so-called Catholics who are members of so many different political parties, or become party-leaders, could live as new creatures who are part of Christ, I believe that their agendas would be totally different as well as their discourse to us and to each other. They would have a different attitude when they speak during some talk shows.

Unfortunately, often being Christian is just a label, which we put on ourselves to give ourselves an identity!

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My beloved, **being Christian means above all be the recipients of a gift, a way of seeing and thinking which do not come from us, but from another World.**

Being Christian means understanding that we can live another life, different from these worldly patterns.

In the other passage that we might have read as a second reading, there is another wonderful teaching: *Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?* (1Cor 5,6).

Well, **this yeast is Jesus.**

Yeast is good to leaven the dough, and flour becomes bread, and **one material reality is turned into another.**

What should the *Communion* which we are all about to receive meant to be?

**The yeast of our life, which changes our existence and makes us live like the children of God.**

This is the meaning of the Holy Communion.

And when we confess, and ask to be pardoned, **our Lord sets upon us his grace, which should indeed change us.** It is the yeast that makes us change from sinners into saints, from selfish into generous, from single-minded to open-minded, from people only caring for their own good, to people who also care for the common good. From people who live in isolation, to people who feel they are the limbs of *Christ's Body*.

This is why Christianity is not a doctrine, nor a religion, since if it were like this, we would be left in the hands of ourselves, pray of our limits, our incapability of coping, our frailty and ignorance.

**Faith means a living Jesus.** He did not only live 2,000 years ago, he has resurrected and continues to live and he is here with us all, and is talking to us and wishes to give himself to us all.

We can be Christian if we discover that Jesus is here and wishes to walk with us, take our hand and become the yeast of our lives and a companion of our life.

*I shall be with you everyday* he said. Do not be fearful, I shall be with you every day. (Mt 28,20)

This is a promise made to every Christian and not only to his Apostles.

If we are true believers, understanding means knowing that our life must be lived together with Jesus.

Therefore, let us ask our Lord – during this Communion – to be able to achieve a better understanding about this life offer and embrace it.

Jesus wants to walk our walk. It is only up to us to reach out, take his hand and walk with Him towards the *Kingdom of Heaven*.

Let the Lord Jesus Christ be praised.

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