

[Acts 5:27-32](#)

[Psalm 150](#)

[Revelation 1:4-8](#)

[John 20:19-31](#)

A SERMON PREACHED BY THE REVEREND ALISTAIR SO, S.O.SC., RECTOR OF ALL HALLOWS PARISH, SOUTH RIVER, IN DAVIDSONVILLE, MARYLAND, ON THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER, APRIL 7, 2013, AT ALL HALLOWS CHAPEL AND THE BRICK CHURCH

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In his Easter sermon, the newly chosen leader of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Francis commented on the differences that can be seen between the men and the women who experienced the first Easter over 2000 years ago.,

He pointed out that Jesus' male apostles and disciples "find it harder to believe in the risen Christ." "Peter runs to the tomb," the pope said, "but stops before the empty tomb. Thomas has to touch the wounds of the body of Jesus with his own hands."

By contrast, the "women are driven by love and they know to accept this proclamation (of the resurrection) with faith. They believe and immediately transmit it; they do not keep it for themselves."

Those words generated various comments and emotions all across the board. Some felt encouraged and hoped that this signaled that the Catholic Church would be more open to the ordination of women. But that very idea, coupled with the Pope's washing of two women's feet on Maundy Thursday, one being a Muslim, sent shock waves to traditionalist quarters.

At our Thursday noon Eucharist at the Chapel, I commented on the Pope's interpretation of the reaction to the male disciples and the holy women. I asked, "How often when we get close to someone, do we begin to form fixed notions about their capacity, about how far they can go in life?" The disciples were very close to Jesus. They lived and traveled together, day in and day out. Yet, on different occasions, the disciples had trouble believing who Jesus really was. After Jesus had calmed a storm, for example, the disciples asked, "Who is this? Even the wind and storm obeyed him?"

The holy women during Jesus' ministry on earth, on the other hand, were mostly outside of his immediate circle of discipleship. They were able to see things from a distance and were less privy to the inner workings of the circle of the disciples. Perhaps this difference in perspectives, rather than their difference in gender is what made them more receptive to the new ideas and revelations about Jesus.

I said that I didn't believe that our receptivity to faith was gender-specific, per se. It is a combination of nature and nurture that helps form our religious views and world views. Some disagreed with me and brought up the idea of right brain and left brain, and how men tend to be more logical and right brained and women are more left brained and sentimental.

That evening, my partner and I went to see a show at the Studio Theater in Washington, DC, entitled *4000 Miles*. In one scene, an octogenarian grandmother was giving advice to her grandson's girlfriend who was threatening to break up with him because of infidelity. The wise, old lady said, "Sometimes, men cheat just because of stupidity and not out of maliciousness..." The young woman retorted, "I don't let people make excuses about their commitment because of gender."

My friends, when it comes to faith and belief, we also ought not to make gender an excuse. In fact, the disciples and the women didn't. It is our twenty-first century re-evaluation and retrospection that puts them into different boxes. They just lived their lives and tackled things accordingly. And even if it were true that the male disciples came to believe more slowly, no one who would dare to say that the depth of their belief was any less than that of the holy women. For one thing, almost all of them were martyred for the faith they followed. Whatever the reason, the reality of the resurrection took some time to sink in. Still deeply grieving when the Risen Christ appeared to them, with heavy hearts and teary eyes, it was hard for them to see a different and new reality - the reality of the Risen Savior. But in the end, they all did see it. They saw with a new vision; they saw with eyes of faith.

Our Gospel lesson about how Thomas came to believe in the Risen Lord is from St. John, who also wrote three letters in the New Testament attributed to him, in addition to Revelation. In his first epistle, John declares and summarizes the Good News to us, we who haven't seen the Risen Lord physically like the disciples and the women. How then do we take in this faith?

John writes, "We declare to you ..... what we have seen with our eyes.....concerning the **word of life**-- this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us-- we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us.....with the Father and with his Son Jesus.

John repeats this conviction when he writes to the seven churches in Asia in the Book of Revelation,

"Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him.."

The essence of John's message is that the Word of Life---Jesus Christ himself---came to assume the same flesh and blood that we are made of, so that we could see for ourselves, so that we could feel for ourselves, God's very deep care for each one of us. But John's writings in the Bible also indicate a circumstantial seeing and reporting. The first witnesses saw the Risen Lord with their own eyes, which strengthened their faith. Whether they believed right away like the women, or they had to digest the fact for a while, like the disciples, they eventually passed on their seeing and believing to the next generation, which passed it on to the next... Apart from the first witnesses, we are called to see and believe as well. But we are called to see with the eyes of faith through the testimony of the Church, the Communion of saints through the ages.

Jesus told Thomas, "Do not doubt but believe." Another translation has it this way, "Do not be faithless, but believing."

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.

We need to be careful in interpreting Jesus' saying here. Jesus is not encouraging a blind, undiscerning faith. Rather, Jesus is elevating us to a divine reality and a holy cognitive level that does not require the seeing with the physical eye. Jesus is implying that we ought to see with the eyes of faith. Even those without physical vision are endowed with the eyes of faith by God. Seeing with the eyes of faith means praying, and meditating on the Holy Word of God; seeing with the eyes of faith means opening our souls to the graces effected by the Sacraments of the Church.

Today, we will celebrate the Holy Baptism of Declan Patrick Sullivan. By our presence here today, we are called to support him and each other in journeys of faith as we strive to grow into the full stature of Christ. Today, we will see the manifestation of the vitality of the Body of Christ as a new member will be added to the Church, which is the Ark of Salvation wrought by Christ.

When we renew our baptismal covenant, I urge you to put that into the context of the disciples and the holy women after the resurrection of Christ. There were many questions surrounding them. There were a lot to take in. But they ultimately all came to believe in the Risen Christ. Perhaps, we encounter some struggles and speed bumps in our coming to believe in Jesus as our Risen Savior who will come again as well.

Let us draw our inspiration from these sacred accounts we have heard today and cast aside all earthly cares.

Press on in our journeys to salvation in spirit and in truth!

Come and believe in the Risen Christ!

Amen.