

2 Easter SML 2018
JN 20:19-31

St. Thomas needed total and complete evidence in the Resurrection before he would believe the disciples. What Thomas required left no room for faith and no reason to pray.

Easter is often the week the skeptics bear their ugly heads asserting that Jesus was not divine, that Jesus was not God, but was merely human, merely a man. In his vast library of books, our Holy Father Emeritus, Benedict, authored a trilogy of books entitled, "Jesus of Nazareth." In these books, the Holy Father said the fundamental question he is exploring is what Jesus did. ``What did Jesus truly bring, if He didn't bring:

- ✓ peace to the world,
- ✓ well-being for all
- ✓ and a better world?

What did He bring? ``The answer is very simple: God. Jesus brought God."

I recently read an article written by a "doubting Thomas" trying to disprove the resurrection. I quote the article: "Modern skeptical theologians are working furiously to disprove the miracles in the Bible, this time to vote on the most explosive question of Christian faith: "Did Jesus literally rise from the dead?"

"You can't take the Bible literally," modern skeptical theologians say. Add the word "always" to say, "You can't always take the Bible literally," and Catholic scripture scholars would agree with that.

"You need to draw on science, archaeology and modern textual criticism to get the full picture." Catholic scripture scholars would agree with that too. In fact, Catholic scripture scholars have used modern text criticism extensively in her study of scripture since 1943 when Pius XII wrote his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* which opened the doors of scripture study in the Catholic Church. But the Church would never agree to discredit the scriptures as if they held no more credence than any uninspired work.

Modern skeptical theologians claim to have studied the medical impact of crucifixion and suggest the crucifixion induced a deep coma from which Our Blessed Lord might have revived. They also said that since the crucifixion was conducted by Roman soldiers, Jesus' body was most likely left on the Cross or tossed into a shallow grave. They claim that, as for Jesus' family and followers, depicted in the Bible as conducting a decent burial of the body according to Jewish law, "They ran." "They lost their nerve," but the skeptical theologians were quick to add, "though not their faith." My guess is these skeptical

theologians are projecting what their response would have been if they were contemporary disciples of Jesus Christ. They would have run.

I suggest these modern skeptical theologians, these “doubting Thomases” do some homework, and start by reading a report in the Journal of the American Medical Association that investigated what a human body was subjected to during a Roman scourging and crucifixion, and if you don't have time to read the Journal, just watch "The Passion of the Christ," for our late Holy Father, John Paul, said of the movie, "It is as it was." Read the Journal or watch the movie, and learn:

- ✓ how a Roman scourging from a whip armed with leather straps, little lead hammers and bones would skin a man from his neck to his knees;
- ✓ added to carrying a 75 pound crossbar tied to his wrists and carried on a skinless back uphill;
- ✓ how a crucified man usually died from asphyxiation because it was so difficult to breathe out; the reason why the Romans used to break the legs of the crucified was so the body would hang and collapse the lungs;
- ✓ and how the Romans were experts at driving a spear into the side of the crucified, right through the lungs and piercing the heart.

The Romans made sure that any man who was sentenced to death by crucifixion did not come off his cross alive. So forget the possibility of a coma.

If modern skeptical theologians claim to read the scriptures using text criticism, these “doubting Thomases” should do more homework and follow the norms of text criticism. Text criticism makes this assertion regarding "multiple attestation." If particular words and deeds of Jesus appear more than once in the four accounts of the gospel, and if they appear in more than one account of the gospel, there is a very good chance those words and deed were actually said and actually happened.

- We have the empty tomb in all four accounts.
- We have appearances of the risen Lord in three Gospels.
- Paul himself speaks of the resurrection.
- Why in all four accounts were women given such a prominent role? If the evangelists made up the resurrection, surely they would have used men's testimonies and not women's. Women were given a prominent role because that's the way it happened. The women saw him die, they saw where he was buried, and they went to the tomb to anoint the body.
- If the resurrection event was fabricated by the disciples, what accounts their coming from the crucifixion cowardly, frightened and doubtful and hiding in the Upper Room, to their going out into the whole world courageously, confident

and optimistic to preach and baptize, and for 10 out of 11 of them to be martyred for the faith? No one makes such a drastic change in their lives on nothing more than a lie.

What these modern skeptical theologians want is total and complete evidence that the resurrection happened, and that they are not going to find. Total and complete evidence leaves no room for faith and no reason to pray.

Since research in the medical profession has made great contributions in proving the resurrection as noted above, medical researchers studying how faith and prayer affect healing, have found that faith and prayer help people get better. Some points made in another article I read, "A Spiritual Awakening in the Nation's Medical Profession."

Research has shown that religion is, in essence, good medicine. Hundreds of studies have shown religious devotion is statistically correlated with greater longevity and health. Religious people simply feel better about themselves and that makes them healthier.

A ground-breaking study was published that drew the medical profession's attention. Nearly 400 patients in the coronary care unit at a San Francisco hospital received the same standard medical treatment with one difference: half were prayed for and prayed with, and half were not. Ultimately,

researchers discovered that there were fewer deaths and fewer medical complications among those who had been the recipients of prayer. These findings, namely, that faith and prayer have a positive effect on healing, have been replicated many times over the years.

During my leave of absence, I was a hospital chaplain at Roanoke Memorial Hospital, which was a Trauma I medical center in Southwest Virginia. And at staff meetings, when cutbacks handed down from on high, and were discussed in every department, cutbacks were never handed down to "Pastoral Care," because the board of directors knew that "Pastoral Care" saved the hospital money. Patients were healthier, there were fewer deaths, and fewer medical complications because the Pastoral Care Department prayed with patients.

Perhaps then, total and complete evidence like this leaves plenty of room for faith, and good reason to pray.