

The Saint Raphael Link

Some Periodic Ramblings of the Prior

April 2017 (Issue 29)

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Dear Members

Do you believe in miracles? Do you believe in honest-to-goodness, old-fashioned acts of God? That's a good question to ask on Easter Day.

Most of us, I suppose, would immediately answer, "Yes, I believe in miracles." And I would say the same. If I were to ask you how many miracles you have ever seen, you would probably say, "Oh, I don't know. I think all of life is a miracle." Or you might say, "Southport beat Manchester United last night and that's a miracle."

Both those things are examples of the English word "miracle," but that's not exactly what I mean when I say, "Do you believe in miracles?" I'm not thinking about the surprising events of life or the long-shot victories. By "miracle" I mean those contrary-to-human-possibility events that have no natural explanation.

"Oh," you say, "That kind of miracle. Sure, I believe in that kind of miracle." But now you are a little more uncertain. That kind of miracle doesn't happen every day. They happen very rarely, in fact. When they do happen, they are very hard to believe—partly because they don't happen very often

and partly because we can't explain them. Even in the Bible that kind of miracle is not an everyday occurrence.

The resurrection of Jesus is that kind of miracle. It is unexplainable by any human or natural means. That may be why we don't talk about it very much. We're not sure how it happened. The crucifixion we can understand; the resurrection is another matter. Here's the proof: Lots of people wear silver crosses around their necks. You don't see many people wearing little silver empty tombs.

So, I ask the question again: Do you believe in miracles? Especially this, do you believe in the greatest miracle of all—the resurrection of Jesus Christ? In case you think you should answer "yes" just because you happen to be a member of a religious order, put your mind at ease. If you answer "No" or "I'm not sure," you are in good company. There are lots of people today who aren't sure whether they believe it or not. And there were lots of people on the first Easter Sunday who weren't sure either. Folks like Peter, James, John, Matthew, Bartholomew, Simon the Zealot, and a man whose name has become synonymous with doubt—Thomas. Doubting Thomas.

It's unfortunate that Thomas is remembered solely in a negative light. There is more to this man than doubt. He first steps onto the stage of biblical history in John 11. Lazarus has died in Bethany—a suburb of Jerusalem. Jesus and the disciples are in the area of Jericho when

they get the word. When Jesus decides to go to Bethany, his disciples remind him that the last time he went to Judea, the leaders tried to stone him to death. It would be suicidal to go back. Jesus decides to go anyway. But the disciples were unconvinced. At that point, Thomas speaks up and says, "Let us go also, that we may die with him." (John 11:16)

It is a brief statement that reveals enormous courage. Thomas agreed that the Jewish leaders would probably kill Jesus if he went back to Jerusalem. Events would soon prove him correct. But what can you say about a man who says, "If they kill him, they'll have to kill me too?" It takes a real man to say that. There is love there, and loyalty, and despair, and sacrifice, and total commitment. It may just be that Thomas understood better than any other disciple what was about to happen. And that brave statement—if you think about it—may explain his later doubts.

The Miracle No One Believed

We tend to forget what it was like on that first Easter morning. It is worth asking ourselves: If we had been there, would we have believed or would we have doubted?

If we had been there in Jerusalem with Matthew, James and John, would we have believed those strange rumours that Sunday morning? In answering that question, it helps to remember how those who knew Jesus best reacted to news of his resurrection.

Very simply, they were not expecting a resurrection. Now it's true that Jesus had predicted that he would be put to death and then raised to life. But his followers did not understand it. A resurrection was the farthest thing from their minds. Forget his predictions. Forget all that brave talk. They had given up.

Who really expected a resurrection on that Sunday morning? Not the disciples. It was the Jewish leaders who persuaded the Romans to seal the tomb. The enemies of Jesus feared something might happen. His friends weren't expecting anything.

Nonsense!

In fact, Mark 16 says that the women who came to his tomb on Sunday morning came to anoint his body. That was part of the embalming process. In the confusion of trying to get the body in the tomb before sundown on Friday, spices had been placed on Jesus' body, but not the ointment. The women came to finish embalming his body.

What did they find when they got there? The stone rolled away and an empty tomb. All four gospels agree on this fact. The women did not have the slightest idea what had happened. They weren't looking for a resurrection.

Mark says that even after the angel explained what had happened, they fled from the tomb trembling and afraid (Mark 16:8). John says that even Mary thought someone had stolen the body (John 20:2). Luke adds that when the women came and told the apostles what the angel had said, "They did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense." (Luke 24:11)

Nonsense. Of course, no one rises from the dead. Not after three days. Not after being scourged. Not after hanging on a cross for six hours. Not after having a sword thrust in their side. Not after being covered with 100 pounds of spices and wrapped in a burial cloth. Not after being sealed in a tomb.

No, the odds are against it. It was impossible. He was a nice man. He meant well. We all loved him. We walked with him as he told those wonderful stories. And, oh,

the miracles he did. We laughed when he told off the Pharisees. How about that time when he did that miracle with the fishes and the loaves? We thought that was great.

Sure, he said he would rise again. We all believed it. He even believed it. He had never been wrong before. Why not? He said he was the Son of God. We're sure going to miss him. Wouldn't it have been great if he had pulled it off? Nobody would believe it. What a party we'd have.

And Mark says, "When they heard Jesus was alive ... they did not believe it." (Mark 16:11) Who could blame them? If you had been there, would you have believed it?

Alone In His Grief

John tells us that Thomas was not present on that Sunday evening when Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst. The Bible doesn't say why, but I think I know. There are basically two different ways people respond to sorrow and tragedy. Some seek solace in the company of their friends. They want people around to help them talk it out. Others prefer to be alone with their thoughts. Such was Thomas.

If it is true that Thomas realized more than the others what was going to happen in Jerusalem, then it may also be true that he was more deeply hurt. He was not with the disciples because his heart had been crushed. Everything he had, he had given to Jesus, and Jesus is dead.

He still loves, still cares, still wants to believe, but his heart is broken. He is not a bad man nor is his doubt sinful. Deep inside he wants to believe. Don't put him down too hard. We've all been in the same place.

If you wish to call Thomas a doubter, please do not make him out an unbeliever. Some have tried to place him in the

company of the sceptics. He does not belong there. Thomas is definitely not a sceptic or a rationalist. His doubts come from devotion to Christ. There is no doubt like the doubt of a broken heart. It's one thing to doubt the Virgin Birth in a classroom setting. It is something else again to lose someone you love and wonder if there is still a God in heaven.

Two Kinds of Doubters

You see, there are two kinds of doubters in the realm of spiritual truth. There are those hard-boiled rationalists who say, "I don't believe it and there's nothing that will make me believe it." Such men enjoy their doubt, talk about it, laugh about it, and get angry when they are refuted. A man like that is not looking for answers; he's looking for an argument. He counts the difficulties, seizes objections, and looks for loopholes. The Pharisees fall into that category. When they asked Jesus for a sign, he refused, calling them "an evil and adulterous generation." (Matthew 16:1-4)

But there is another kind of doubter, the person who says, "I don't believe but I'm willing to believe if I can see for myself." Thomas fits this category. He is not an unbelieving skeptic; rather, he is a wounded believer. Remember, Thomas didn't doubt the miraculous in general. He had seen many of Jesus' greatest miracles. But this one was too big to take someone else's word for it. He had to see it to believe it. And who could blame him?

No one wanted to believe more than Thomas. But he had seen too much, he knew too much, all the facts pointed in one direction. Before Thomas would believe he had to personally see Jesus. And he had to be sure it was Jesus—not some dream or vision. He had to be sure it was the same Jesus he saw die. That's why he couldn't just take the word of the disciples. Not on

something like this. He was not unwilling to believe, but unable.

No Second-Hand Faith

Some people are satisfied with the testimony of others. Some are not. Thomas was not. Did he doubt the truthfulness of the others? No, he knew they believed they had seen Jesus. But that wasn't enough. Lots of people think they see things. Thomas couldn't get rid of the suspicion that they had seen a ghost. He could not live with a second-hand faith. He had to see for himself.

When he says, "Unless I touch his wounds, I will not believe," there is much more than doubt. There is love, and sorrow, and pain, and a tiny grain of hope. Thomas stands for all time as the one man who most desperately wanted to believe if only he could be sure. Can you blame him? Would you have been any different?

Doubters Welcome at the Empty Tomb

After all these years, Thomas has gotten a bad reputation. Doubting Thomas, we call him. We tend to look down on him. But not Jesus. Eight days later Jesus appeared to the disciples a second time. This time Thomas was with them. Jesus speaks to him as to one whose faith is weak, not to one who has an evil heart. He said, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." (John 20:27)

It's worth noting that Jesus knew all about Thomas' doubts. He knew the raging sea within his heart. And he came just so Thomas could be sure. Jesus didn't put him down. He said, "Go ahead, all you who wonder if it is true. See for yourself. Stop doubting and believe." Here is the wonderful truth. Doubters are welcome at the empty tomb.

Do you believe in miracles? Do you believe in the miracle we celebrate on Easter? If you answer "No" or "I'm not sure," then welcome. It's okay to be an honest doubter. If you came that way and want to leave that way, it's okay. When you're ready, he'll be there waiting for you.

Stop Doubting and Believe

All that God asks is that men be consistent with themselves. He asks that you give this story the same treatment you give to any other story. Sift the evidence, judge the record and come to a conclusion.

It's all right to doubt, but don't let your doubts keep you away. Come to the empty tomb and see for yourself. When Thomas saw Jesus, he fell at his feet and exclaimed, "My Lord and my God." (John 20:28) That stands as the greatest testimony given by any of the apostles. It is the climax of John's gospel. And it comes from the man who had the strongest doubts.

It is a wonderful truth that the greatest doubters often become the strongest believers. And the honest doubts—once resolved—become the bedrock of an unshakeable faith. It has been said that no truth is so strongly believed as that which you once doubted. In the history of the Christian church, the greatest doubters have often become the strongest believers.

That's why the story of Thomas is in the Bible—so that honest doubters might be encouraged to bring their honest doubts to the empty tomb. Thomas did, and his doubts were washed away by the person of Jesus Christ—alive from the dead.

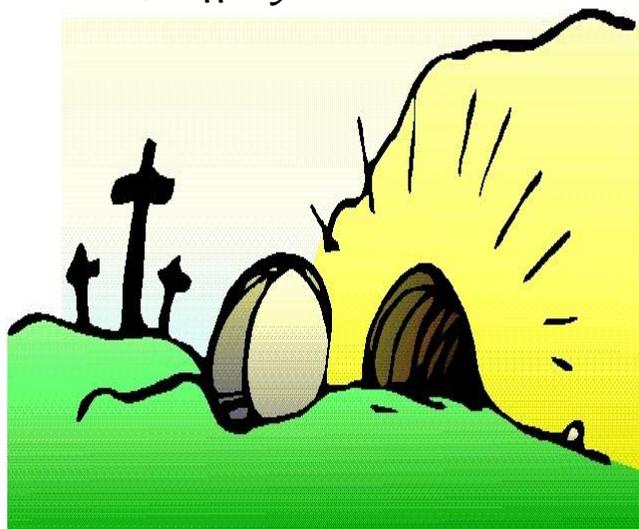
One other thing. No one can remain neutral forever. You can bring your doubts to the empty tomb, but you have to make a choice! You cannot stay on the fence forever. Either you believe or you don't.

Easter Sunday is a wonderful day to make that choice. It's a great day to stop doubting and start believing.

You know that Jesus died. There is no doubt about that. You know he died for you. You know he rose from the dead. The question God is asking you is, "What have you done with my Son?"

Jesus said, "Stop doubting and believe."

+*Geoffrey* – GRAND PRIOR



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Calendar of Saints



Saint Vincent Ferrer's Story

The polarization in the Church today is a mild breeze compared with the tornado that ripped the Church apart during the lifetime of this saint. If any saint is a patron of reconciliation, Vincent Ferrer is.

Despite parental opposition, he entered the Dominican Order in his native Spain at 19. After brilliant studies, he was ordained a priest by Cardinal Peter de Luna—who would figure tragically in his life.

Of a very ardent nature, Vincent practiced the austerities of his Order with great energy. He was chosen prior of the Dominican house in Valencia shortly after his ordination.

The Western schism divided Christianity first between two, then three, popes. Clement VII lived at Avignon in France, Urban VI in Rome. Vincent was convinced the election of Urban was invalid, though Catherine of Siena was just as devoted a supporter of the Roman pope. In the service of Cardinal de Luna, Vincent worked to persuade Spaniards to follow Clement. When Clement died, Cardinal de Luna was elected at Avignon and became Benedict XIII.

Vincent worked for him as apostolic penitentiary and Master of the Sacred Palace. But the new pope did not resign as all candidates in the conclave had sworn to do. He remained stubborn, despite being deserted by the French king and nearly all of the cardinals.

Vincent became disillusioned and very ill, but finally took up the work of simply "going through the world preaching Christ," though he felt that any renewal in the Church depended on healing the schism. An eloquent and fiery preacher, he spent the last 20 years of his life

spreading the Good News in Spain, France, Switzerland, the Low Countries and Lombardy, stressing the need of repentance and the fear of coming judgment. He became known as the "Angel of the Judgment."

Vincent tried unsuccessfully, in 1408 and 1415, to persuade his former friend to resign. He finally concluded that Benedict was not the true pope. Though very ill, he mounted the pulpit before an assembly over which Benedict himself was presiding, and thundered his denunciation of the man who had ordained him a priest. Benedict fled for his life, abandoned by those who had formerly supported him. Strangely, Vincent had no part in the Council of Constance, which ended the schism

Guess the Locations:

1. Holy Sepulchre / 2. Chichester Cathedral

Poem – "Easter Joy"

by Joanna Fuchs

Jesus came to earth,
To show us how to live,
How to put others first,
How to love and how to give.

Then He set about His work,
That God sent Him to do;
He took our punishment on Himself;
He made us clean and new.

He could have saved Himself,
Calling angels from above,
But He chose to pay our price for sin;
He paid it out of love.

Our Lord died on Good Friday,
But the cross did not destroy
His resurrection on Easter morn
That fills our hearts with joy.

Now we know our earthly death,
Like His, is just a rest.
We'll be forever with Him
In heaven, where life is best.

So we live our lives for Jesus,
Think of Him in all we do.
Thank you Saviour; Thank you Lord.
Help us love like you!



Cook's Corner: Peaches 'n Cream JIGGLERS



INGREDIENTS:

1-3/4 cups boiling water, divided / 1 env.
(1/4 oz.) KNOX Unflavoured Gelatine / 1 tin
(14 oz.) sweetened condensed milk / 2 pkg.
(3 oz. each) JELL-O Peach Flavour
Gelatine / 1/4 cup cold water

METHOD:

Add 1/2 cup boiling water to unflavoured gelatine in medium bowl; stir until completely dissolved. Stir in milk. Pour into 8-inch square dish sprayed with cooking spray.

Refrigerate 25 to 30 min. or until set but not firm. Meanwhile, add remaining boiling water to peach gelatine mixes in separate medium bowl; stir 2 min. until completely dissolved. Stir in cold water. Cool until ready to use.

Pour peach gelatine slowly over gelatine layer in dish. Refrigerate 2 hours or until firm before cutting into 36 squares.

Guess the Locations:

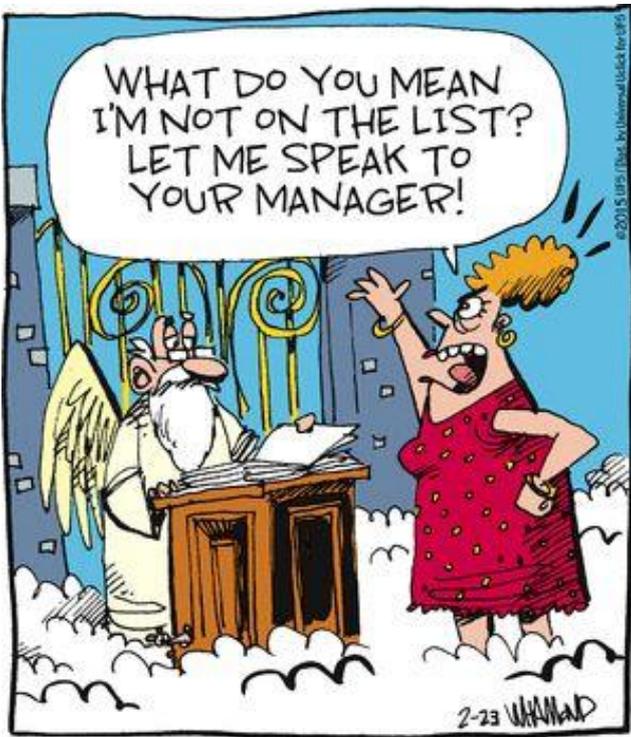


1.



2.

Story of the Taxi Driver and St Peter



One Easter a priest and a taxi driver both died and went to heaven. St. Peter was at the Pearly gates waiting for them.

'Come with me,' said St. Peter to the taxi driver.

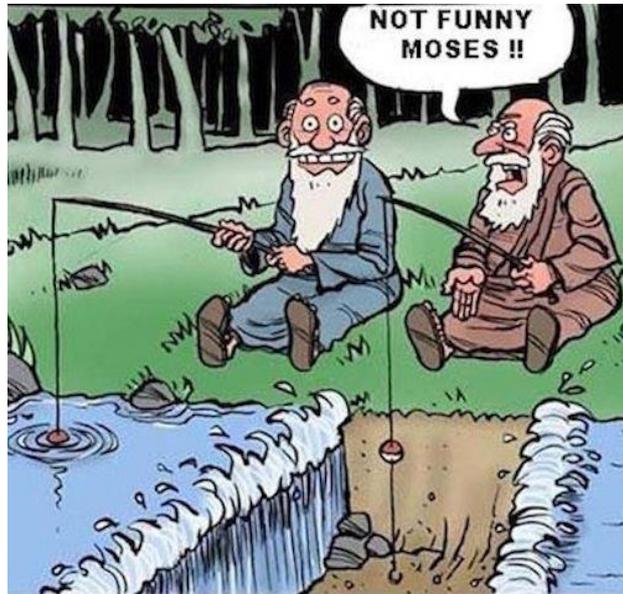
The taxi driver did as he was told and followed St Peter to a mansion. It had everything you could imagine from a bowling alley to an Olympic size pool.

'Oh my word, thank you,' said the taxi driver.

Next, St. Peter led the priest to a rough old shack with a bunk bed and a little old television set.

'Wait, I think you are a little mixed up,' said the priest. 'Shouldn't I be the one who gets the mansion? After all I was a priest, went to church every day, and preached God's word.'

'Yes, that's true.' St Peter re-joined, 'But during your Easter sermons people slept. When the taxi driver drove, everyone prayed.'



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(See Genesis 19:1-29)

02-25-2003

SOMETIMES I MISS THE OLD TESTAMENT DAYS WHEN WE COULD SMITE THEM FOR THAT KIND OF BEHAVIOR

**Peterborough Investiture –
Saturday 13th May 2017**



**The Healing Teaching
& Chivalric Order of
St Raphael**

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