

Homily for 2nd Sunday of Easter  
April 19, 2009

### Introduction

Before all else, we should give ourselves a round of applause for the wonderful compliment Jesus pays us in today's Gospel: "blessed are they who have not seen and have believed". That's you and I; we surely have not seen the way the Apostle Thomas saw and yet we do say with him: "my Lord and my God".

### I

It is intriguing to note the juxtaposition of today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel. The latter is all about faith - belief in the Risen Lord and the portion from Acts highlights the fact that our faith is best lived, perhaps can only be lived, in the context of community "all the believers were of one mind and one heart".

### II

We know, too, that communities of faith are many things, a whole range of "interesting people". My own life-long community, for example, the Franciscan Order, contends that the world owes us a huge debt of gratitude "because we are keeping some 30,000 screwballs off the streets".

### III

Seriously, though, perhaps a couple of recent examples from my own life may underscore the value of, need for community as we go on with the crucial business of living our faith in the Risen Lord.

Recently, I received a long letter from a young man whom I've known since he was in his early teens. He's now approaching middle age, married and the father of two impressive sons. I've always liked him and respected his judgments.

His letter expressed in kindly but quite articulate terms his unease with my homilies in these later years. He feels that I have become harsh, even intolerant in my judgments and wishes to talk with me about this matter.

It was not an easy letter to receive - all of us who preach like to think that we're nearly perfect in what we say and how - but I shall definitely take my friend up on his invitation to dialogue. This little episode reminds me that a true community is one in which these sorts of encounters can happen with great benefit on all sides.

### IV

Another experience. During this recent lenten season I had the occasion to preach a parish mission at St. Anthony's Parish in Falls Church. As you know, St. Anthony's is a mega-parish which serves the spiritual and material needs of thousands in the Northern Virginia area. It was good to be close to that thriving center for a few days and especially to get to know the dynamic pastor, Fr. Horace "Tuck" Grinnell. Being around him taught me a great pastoral lesson - he allows for all kinds of initiatives to blossom at St. Anthony's, some which I think I would not greatly favor, nor does he, but which he helps and nurtures because they are legitimate expressions of a different way of living one's faith. Another example of what a community of faith can teach and affirm.

### Conclusion

With apologies for these very personal anecdotes, which I hope illustrate the intimate connection between community and our faith life, let me offer a final one.

So many years ago now, two of us college classmates at St. Bonaventure University in Western New York State joined the Franciscan Order. We went through the various stages of preparation for life in the Order and the priesthood and were ordained on the same day, April 25, 1958.

Our lives diverged dramatically after that and over the years I noticed that my friend became more and more conservative in his views regarding just about everything. He came to believe, for example, that the Second Vatican Council was a complete disaster for the Catholic Church. I have to admit that this gave me a certain feeling of superiority - I had "seen the light" while he hadn't.

About two months ago I read in one of our Franciscan newsletters that my friend had been nominated to the Athletic Hall of Fame at our Alma Mater, where he had taught and ministered for a good portion of his life as a friar-priest. The citation read at his induction listed the enormous impact which this priest had made not only on the athletic world of that university but on the entire student body and alumni. It was an amazing record and one which forced me to reconsider all of my unkind conclusions about my friend.

Just one more example of the necessary correctives which the community of faith can represent for each of us, if we keep our eyes open to them.