

Rev. Kevin V. Madigan
Church of St. Thomas More, NYC **April 28, 2019**
Easter 2nd Sunday **John 20:19-31**

Today we remember doubting Thomas. We pause to reflect on what is faith--in what do we believe, in what, in whom do we place our trust. The Brooklyn Bridge, at the time of its construction, was seen as the greatest engineering feat of its time. This magnificent structure, with its tensile strength linking the boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn, might serve as a metaphor for faith. The Brooklyn Bridge is a triumph of engineering wedded to the beauty of form. Its graceful arches support the seemingly delicate steel cables from which hangs suspended the roadway below. The poet Hart Crane summed it up:

*"O harp and altar, of the fury fused
(How could mere toil align thy choring strings!)
Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge
O sleepless as the river under thee
Vaulting the sea, the prairies dreaming nod,
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
And of the curvship lend a myth to God."*

Again, science and art produce an architectural triumph that is hailed to this day.

To return to today's Gospel, might not faith be seen as a similar construction, but of the soul. That as we believe, we build a bridge of sorts, that links us to very close, but seemingly inaccessible realities, viz. God—very delicate constructions of the human heart, yet capable of supporting very heavy burdens. To pursue that metaphor, the genius of Roebling, the bridge's architect, was to use steel for wire, and then weave those many strands into four strong cables that would support the bridge. We can ask ourselves, how do we weave together the different strands, the threads of our experience, our insights, our feelings into the one strong fiber of faith?

In today's Gospel we read of Thomas who believes only because he sees—because he has the very indisputable presence of the risen Jesus before him. And Jesus says, "blessed" are they who will have to make do with much less; who will have to rely upon "signs" instead of sight; who will weave together from the testimony of the Scriptures, from the musings of philosophers, from their own experience, and from the promptings and grace of the Holy Spirit; who will weave the fabric of faith. Like Thomas, that may not be enough for us. We may require some indisputable evidence; we may demand "sight" instead of "signs." But, in honesty, we have to ask in how

many areas of life—for whatever questions, apart from religion—is there given some absolutely convincing, unquestionable proof, that “this” is the answer, that “this” is the path to take? Probably never! Life just doesn’t work that way: we have to settle for much less than absolute certainty.

Even science works this way—science that is held out by the atheist as the antidote to the superstition of religion. Scientists admit that when they are at the point of making some revolutionary breakthrough, their progress does not proceed in some neat, closely ordered, strictly logical manner. Rather, there are multiple strands and diverse types of evidence, data, hunches and arguments that all come together to support a theory or hypothesis. Any one of those strands might be too weak in itself and insufficient by itself to support the proposed theory, but collectively they provide a stronger warrant for rational belief than any single line of argument could offer—like a strong cable that is made up of weaker strands. As probabilities converge, the truth begins to disclose itself.

Is it reasonable to demand that faith should provide more certainty than what any other realm of life can offer? We are closer to the truth when we realize that science is much more reliant upon a naturalistic “faith,” a scientist’s trust in the rationality of the universe, than we are accustomed to imagine. Galileo presumed that the same laws of nature that were operative on earth were at work on the moon, without ever actually going there. That hunch was essentially an act of faith, that was the foundation for all his observations. Scientists today do the same in regards to the farthest reaches of the universe, again without ever having travelled there. Likewise, faith is more reasonable than we may have been led to believe. Faith need not be blind, a leap in the dark, but a conclusion resulting from a variety of factors, wherein we are led to a threshold, open to the invitation of divine grace, to cross over.

Faith is always a gift from God. But our response to that invitation is constructed like the cables of a suspension bridge, forged from various experiences, our musings, our temperament, our personality. From all that, a bridge is built to carry us across the chasms of doubt, uncertainty and fear. May we always walk that bridge, confident that it leads us to the living God.