

would not accept their witness. He wanted proof and presence. He made his faith conditional on physical evidence. Unless I can see and touch Jesus' wounds, he said, I refuse to believe.

When Jesus does appear to Thomas, a week later, Jesus does not chide him; but he probes Thomas with the challenge to touch him. "Doubting" Thomas then makes the greatest profession of faith of all the disciples when he says to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!"

Thomas' doubt was removed by Jesus' presence, but Jesus speaks to the future generations of people like us who have not seen Jesus: "Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Application

Is it easy to believe? For some who live in a Christian family or community, with the supports and signs of faith around them, then belief may come easily. But, for the majority of people in our world today, faith is an act made in the face of doubt and uncertainty. Joseph Ratzinger speaks of the "oppressive power of unbelief" in the contemporary world, which affects our own will to believe. There are many "Thomases" today who want empirical, scientific proof before they will risk breaking out of a room where they are locked in by their own suspicions.

There are some Christians who feel guilty about having doubts, feeling that they should have no difficulty in just accepting everything they are told in church. Today's Gospel is a reassurance and reminder that doubt was present right from the beginning of the Church, even in the apostles. They came by stages to faith, helped by Jesus and the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that St John calls "another witness" and "the truth". Faith will always involve a risk and an act of trust. Thomas expressed his doubts but ended with a profound faith. And the history of the Church shows how, down through the centuries, Christians have overcome their doubts, developed a strong faith in the risen Christ and are indeed blessed because "they have not seen and yet believe".