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Doubting Thomas: John 20:24-29

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There are biblical precursors to Thomas the Doubter and we'll spend a few minutes looking at them.

*Abraham:* When God told Abraham that he and Sarah would bear a child he fell on his face and laughed because he was 100 years old and Sarah was 90.

*Sarah:* She too laughed and when God asked Abraham why she laughed he reminded Abraham that nothing was too hard for the Lord. Sarah lied and denied that she laughed – undoubtedly because she thought it absurd that at her age she'd become a mother

*David:* In Psalm 13:1-2, David asked God "Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?"

*Job:* God rebuked Job for questioning God's presence with him. There is a lengthy litany of Job's wailings and complaints but, in the end, Job tells God that in the past he heard about God but now he saw God and he repented in dust and ashes

*Moses:* When God called Moses to bring his people out of Egypt, Moses doubted himself. He told God that the people would never believe him; they wouldn't do what he would tell them to do; that he was not a good speaker; that he had a speech impediment; and after each of Moses' excuses, God assured and reassured him that he would be with Moses and even then, Moses told God to send someone else! Then God got angry and told Moses he'd send his brother Aaron, who was a good speaker, to be his spokesman.

*Jonah:* Jonah resisted the call to lead when God called him to go to Nineveh. In fact, he fled and boarded a ship to Tarshish and ended up in the belly of a whale for three days before the Lord spoke to the whale; it expelled Jonah and he went on his way to Niveveh.

*Peter and the storm at sea:* Peter doubted that Jesus would support him on the blustery water; he took his eyes off Jesus and focused on the wind and began to sink. Jesus admonished him "O you of little faith ..."

*In each of these figures, there was a movement from unbelief and mistrust to belief after an encounter with God.*

There are also non-biblical figures who doubted, one of whom was Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She suffered intense spiritual darkness and doubt for the last 40 years of her life. In her letters to her spiritual advisors, she bemoaned the dryness, loneliness and torture she underwent. She compared her experiences to hell; they drove her to doubt the very existence of God. She wrote "I do not see neither with my mind nor with my reason the place of God in my soul. There is no God in me. I feel that God does not want me. He is not there." (It's like us asking, "Does God hear? Does God care? Is God even here?") Her own feelings of abandonment by God heightened her sensitivity to the

feelings of abandonment and despair of the poorest of the poor and the sickest of the sick. She came to believe that her painful experiences of darkness were a sharing in the passion of Jesus and it was her mission to be a beacon of light to those who felt unwanted, unloved and uncared for. She became an advocate of love and hope to them.

Just before today's Gospel reading, Jesus' disciples were cowering behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. They were in a lockdown. Jesus came and stood before them and said, "Peace be with you," then he showed them his hands and side. Thomas wasn't there – he missed the meeting, so the other disciples told him they had seen the Lord. Thomas was clear and absolute. He needed confirmation and told them unless he *saw* the print of the nail and *placed his finger* in the marks of the nails in his hands and side he would not believe. Eight days later, the disciples were gathered together behind closed doors and Jesus came and stood among them. He told Thomas to put his finger in his hands and side and told Thomas not to be faithless but to believe. Jesus did not chastise nor condemn him. He met Thomas where he was and gave him what he needed – concrete proof of God's love for him. This is an example that Thomas lacked understanding of Jesus' repeated disclosures that he was going to be executed in Jerusalem and rise on the third day.

What about us ... do we say "Unless ... I will not believe?" Do we doubt ourselves? Do we doubt God? Do we hear the powerful words of Jesus: *peace be with you*? Do we hear Jesus say I have you by the hand – I am with you all the time and in all ways – on your doubting days and on your believing trusting days?

The psalmist in today's reading gives us the solution to doubting: "The fidelity of the Lord endures forever," and the letter to the Ephesians tells us that we are members of God's family; that the cornerstone/foundation is Christ Jesus. Let us remember to **WHOM** we belong when we feel insecure, doubtful or lacking trust.