



Daily Reflections

April 23, 2017

Scripture

John 20: 19-31

On the evening of that first day of the week,
when the doors were locked, where the disciples were,
for fear of the Jews,
Jesus came and stood in their midst
and said to them, "Peace be with you."
When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.
The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.
As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them,
"Receive the Holy Spirit.
Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them,
and whose sins you retain are retained."
Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve,
was not with them when Jesus came.

So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord."
But he said to them,
"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands
and put my finger into the nailmarks
and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."
Now a week later his disciples were again inside
and Thomas was with them.
Jesus came, although the doors were locked,
and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you."
Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands,
and bring your hand and put it into my side,
and do not be unbelieving, but believe."
Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!"
Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me?
Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."
Now, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples
that are not written in this book.
But these are written that you may come to believe
that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

Our Scripture Reflection

Oh, how the disciple Thomas has received so much bad press throughout history. The label "Doubting Thomas" was placed on him from the early years of the Church. But is that label really accurate? Sure, Thomas had a lapse in faith because of what happened at Calvary. But something would change after he saw the Risen Lord. Notice, he did not accept the Lord's challenge to touch and probe His wounds. No, Thomas falls down in worship and proclaims, "My Lord and My God!" Please note, no other disciple called Jesus "God" in the Bible and Thomas would go on to lay down his life for Jesus on the cross. What a turn around story!

Food for your Journey

Jesus' encounter with Thomas is reminiscent of a scene early in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, in which Hugo describes the fall, the actual moral

disintegration, of Jean Valjean, a common laborer who's sentenced to five years in jail for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his starving family. The ravages of Valjean's time in prison, which is stretched from five to 19 years, have, as Hugo describes, withered his soul.

Once Valjean is released, his descent continues, as no one will give him work or even sell him food or shelter because of his criminal record. Hopeless and exhausted, he stumbles into the house of an old bishop, who greets him courteously and treats him as an honored guest.

Valjean, though, ever the hardened realist, is confused by his host's generosity and, unwilling to believe and unable to accept the genuineness of such treatment, steals the

silverware from the bishop's cupboard and flees into the night. The next day, the police arrive at the bishop's house with the captured criminal and the silver. Valjean, naturally, is utterly dejected at the sure prospect of returning to prison.

Confronted by the man who returned his generosity with treachery, however, the bishop astonishes both the thief and his arresters: "I'm glad to see you," he says. "But I gave you the candlesticks, too, which are silver like the rest and would bring 200 francs. Why didn't you take them along with your cutlery?"

As Hugo narrates, at the bishop's astounding words, "Jean Valjean opened his eyes and looked at the bishop with an expression no human tongue could describe."

Forced to release their captive at the bishop's insistence, the police depart and the bishop hands Valjean the candlesticks, holding him just a moment longer before sending him freely on his way with this blessing: "Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good. It is your soul I am buying for you. I withdraw it from dark thoughts ... and I give it to God."

In the very next scene, Hugo describes Valjean's lengthy and pathetic weeping as he views the depths to which he has sunk and begins to comprehend the whole new world of forgiveness and grace into which he has been ushered. In that moment, Jean Valjean dies ... and is reborn, and much

of the rest of this long and turbulent novel is the story of the new reality that Valjean both lives and gives as a result of his encounter with transforming grace.

If you tell me Christian commitment is a kind of thing that has happened to you once and for all like some kind of spiritual plastic surgery, I say, you're either pulling the wool over your own eyes or trying to pull it over mine. Every morning you should wake up in your bed and ask yourself: "Can I believe it all again today?" No, better still, don't ask it till after you've read *The New York Times*, till after you've studied that daily record of the world's brokenness and corruption, which should always stand side by side with your Bible. Then ask yourself if you can believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ again for that particular day.

If your answer's always Yes, then you probably don't know what believing means. At least five times out of ten the answer should be No, because the No is as important as the Yes, maybe more so. The No is what proves you're human in case you should ever doubt it. And then, if some morning the answer happens to be really Yes, it should be a Yes that's choked with confession and tears and ... great laughter.

--Frederick Buechner, *The Return of Ansel Gibbs* (Knopf, 1959), 303.

A Prayer from the Heart

Dear Jesus, Please give me the Grace to walk through the times I doubt and keep my eyes opened and focused on You. Amen.