

Gospel text

John 20: 19-31

19 Now on the same day, the first of the week, when evening had come and the doors had been closed, where the disciples had taken refuge for fear of the Jews, Jesus made himself present, standing, in the midst of them and said to them, "Peace be in you!" 20 And while saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. Seeing thus the Lord, the disciples were full of joy. 21 Then he said unto them again: "Peace be in you; in the same way that the Father sent me on a mission, I am also sending you". 22 And while saying this, he breathed on them with these words, "Receive the Spirit 23 If you happen to liberate any from their waywardnesses, they will be removed from their life, but if you happen to leave them with their waywardnesses, these will stay with them."

24 Now Thomas, one of the group of the Twelve, the one people call the Twin, was not with them when Jesus made his presence felt. 25 Then 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 in the mark of the nails and put my hand on the side of his chest, I will not believe."

26 Behold, eight days later his disciples found themselves in the same place, with Thomas this time. Jesus makes himself present while the doors are closed, standing, in the middle of them and says to them, "Peace be in you!" 27 Then he addressed Thomas, "Put your finger here and look at my hands, put your hand forward too and put it on the side of my chest, and stop being an unbeliever, but become a man of faith." 28 Thomas reacts by saying, "My Lord and my God". 29 Jesus said to him, "You have become a believer because you have seen me. As for those who have become believers without having seen, let them continue, they are on the way to happiness."

30 Jesus produced before his disciples still many other actions revealing the presence of God that were not recorded in this book. 31 But these were so that you would believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by your faith you would have true life through him.

Gospel commentary - Homily

The constant evolution of one's own faith

With age, as is my case, we happen to be like Thomas the Twin, to have more difficulty believing, to feel less than before the presence of God. What is going on then?

The most beautiful parallel I could find to understand the evolution of faith is that of the parent-child relationship. In our childhood, parents were very present, protecting us and pampering us, because we were totally dependent on them. On the spiritual level, we feel blessed by God and his presence is felt every moment. In the Gospel this period corresponds to the narratives on miracles in which the wonders of God are celebrated. A Thérèse of Lisieux rejoiced like a child to see this exceptional snow she had asked for and which fell during her religious profession. A Formula 1 driver Ayrton Senna boasted of being protected by God.

Then comes adolescence, when we discover another world than that of the parents and who questions it. In the world of faith, it is the observation that one can very well live without God and be authentic, and above all that injustices and evil are so present in this world that this earth seems to turn without God doing anything. In the Gospel, this crisis is especially present with the arrival of the passion and the trial of Jesus: there are no more miracles, but only the harsh reality of life. Even a Thérèse of Lisieux experienced the torture of questioning. Ayrton Senna died in a Formula 1 racing accident.

What happens to parents for children of adulthood? Unless we have remained a dependent being, we no longer have a utilitarian relationship. The only possibility: a new type of relationship, much more equal, focused more on a form of friendship. Wouldn't that be the same thing on God's side? One could cry out with indignation at my assertion, reminding that we are not God. Obviously, unless your name is Raël! But did not Jesus say: "I no longer call you servants ... I call you friends".

The whole Gospel of this day, which takes place after the death of Jesus, goes in the same direction. Why do the disciples rejoice at the sight of Jesus? The source of this joy is the simple fact that he is present, that he is alive. It even seems that such an attitude is only possible after an experience of mourning, as lived by the disciples, as if the omnipresent and omnipotent face of the parent had to die.

What causes Thomas to cry out, "My Lord and my God." Would he have received a special favor, for example a cure? Absolutely not. This cry of faith comes to him from the fact that he feels known to Jesus: indeed, the latter takes up all the words of Thomas said eight days earlier in the face of the other disciples, as if he had been there. This knowledge is that which exists only in deep love. The same can be said of what Mary Magdalene experienced with the gardener near the empty tomb, when the latter said to her, "Mary!", And she exclaimed, "Rabbouni!" As the Gospel of John says: "The shepherd knows his sheep by name..."

When Jesus says, "As the Father sent me, I too send you", we are sent back to the situation where the parents step aside to let the children take up the torch. To pursue a mission, you need a minimum of equality. This is, moreover, the meaning of the gift of the Spirit. We are able to decentring of ourselves, and to give birth in turn. Thérèse of Lisieux said before dying, "When I am dead ... I want to continue being a missionary".

I say all this, because I am convinced that this paradigm makes it possible to make the transition to an adult faith, the faith resulting from Easter. Although we are created, finite, limited and sinful beings, we are called to a love of intimacy as if we were equal with our creator. This does not take away from the moments when we cry for help, but it is done in the context of a being who opens up to a friend. This is the Gospel of John.

My difficulty in believing probably comes from the difficult birth of faith after Easter, when we first have to experience a form of mourning in our perception of the one we called God. During the celebration of this Sunday, why not exclaim, "How great is the mystery of faith".

-André Gilbert, Gatineau, January 2003