

**The Second Sunday of Easter**  
**April 30-May 1, 2011**  
**John 20:19-31**

***“Walking by Faith”***

Each year, the President of the United States declares January 16<sup>th</sup> to be Religious Freedom Day, and calls upon Americans to “observe this day through appropriate events and activities in homes, schools, and places of worship.” The day is the anniversary of the passage in 1786 of the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom (<http://religiousfreedomday.com>). This year on January 14, President Barack Obama issued his proclamation for Religious Freedom Day. In upholding the values of our nation that recognizes the separation of church and state, and that there will be no establishment of a national religion, the president noted that one is even free not to believe. The President wrote, “The writ of the Founding Fathers has upheld the ability of Americans to worship and practice religion as they choose, including the right to believe in no religion at all.” It is the challenge of not believing that confronts us today. It is what confronted Jesus when he met Thomas in that upper room. Thomas wanted physical proof in order to believe that Jesus had truly risen from the dead, and he wanted the freedom not to believe if the facts did not substantiate a true resurrection. Jesus offered Thomas the proof of his hands and side: **“Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side”** (John 20:27). Scripture does not record if Thomas actually put his finger into the mark of the nails in Jesus’ hands, or if he placed his hand in the wound where the spear pierced Jesus’ side. We are not told this. It is our right to have no religion at all. It is natural for us to question as Thomas did. But we cannot escape what Jesus said to Thomas: **“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”** (John 20:29). The message for this Second Sunday of Easter is entitled, “Walking by Faith.” May the Lord’s rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus’ sake.

So, what does it mean to “walk by faith?” A colleague of mine in ministry on the west coast describes it like this: “Whenever I speak to a group of people and ask the question, ‘Who here would like to be a part of a miracle?’ almost every hand goes up, if not all of them. It’s exciting to see their enthusiasm. But then I share with them that it takes an impossible situation in order for there to be a ‘miracle.’ Having told them that, I ask another question, ‘How many of you want to be a part of an impossible situation?’ This time, not as many hands go up. And then I ask them, ‘How many of you would like to CHOOSE to PUT yourself into an impossible situation?’ This time, almost no hands go up. Most, if not all of us, have cried out to God for a ‘miracle’ when we have ‘found’ ourselves in an impossible situation. It does take faith to be willing to turn to God in situations like that, and as it should be, God is willing and eager to respond. But how much more faith it takes, and how much more it must thrill God, when we ask for the faith and courage to PUT ourselves into an impossible situation, simply because we believe that is exactly what we should do! In fact, isn’t that the call of every follower of Jesus, to obey Him, no matter what He asks and no matter how impossible what He is asking may seem? There are so many examples in the Bible of God’s followers doing just that” (Dr. Scott F. Rische, City Transformation Ministries, May 2011 newsletter). We do not have to go looking for impossible situations in life, perhaps heedlessly or foolishly putting ourselves or others in danger. As part of our journey of faith, these impossible situations will find us! Knowingly or unknowingly, Thomas put himself into something of an impossible situation when he

said: **“Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe”** (John 20:25). Impossible for man, but not for God. Walking by faith begins with the miracle of believing what we have not seen. As Peter writes in today’s Second Lesson: **“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls”** (1 Peter 1:8-9). As our Confirmands reaffirm their Baptismal vows this day in the Rite of Confirmation, they will discover – as we will also – what it means to walk by faith. Those first disciples in today’s First Reading (Acts 5:29-42) were commanded by the ruling council in Jerusalem not to preach or teach in Jesus’ name. Further, they were beaten for doing so. And yet, we read that after they were beaten, **“... they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name”** (Acts 5:41). That, my friends, is walking by faith.

So, the royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton took place this past Friday and is now history. We give thanks to God for averting disaster and terrorism at such a public event, and pray the Lord’s blessing upon this young couple for a long and happy life together. And we can finally get back to life without 24/7 media coverage about this! That may be how some are feeling about Easter: it’s over and we can now get on with life. But you see, every morning is Easter morning from now on. Every day is resurrection day. The Lord Jesus who was nailed to the tree of the cross for our sins has now risen from the dead. He lives and reigns to all eternity, and that changes everything. The crucified and risen Savior **“who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification”** (Romans 4:25) has gone out ahead of us, leading us on the way, calling us to impossible situations through which his resurrection power and peace will be revealed in our lives so that doubt may be transformed into living faith. Brothers and sisters, let us walk by faith.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.