

Faith isn't just a feeling. It isn't a thoughtless dependence on something unknown. It's true that faith does not come from our own thinking and understanding. It doesn't come from someone making a conscious decision to believe. American Evangelicals will often refer to a so called believer's baptism, as opposed to an infant baptism. They assume that babies can't have faith and therefore shouldn't be baptized. But baptism gives faith, especially to babies. In fact, this is the only kind of faith God gives. Jesus says that you must become like a little child if you will enter the kingdom of heaven. And St. Peter writes the words for our *Introit*, "Like newborn babes, desire the pure spiritual milk of the Word. (1 Pet 2:2)" A newborn baby doesn't understand how his mother's body works. But he knows his mother. He knows her breast. When he's hungry he cries. He can barely open his eyes, and he can't focus his sight on his mother. He hardly sees or understands. But this doesn't mean that he is thoughtless. This doesn't mean that he just feels fed. No, he knows his mother, and he is fed by her. When his mouth touches her breast and he tastes the milk then his lips clamp down. This is what faith does. Faith doesn't come about after we first understand it, confess it, or even see it. And yet, as surely as the mother's milk is true and nourishing food, so the Word of our Savior is pure and true.

This is because it is the Word of the crucified and risen Lord. Jesus told Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." And yet, he still showed himself to Thomas. This is so that you would know that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. A faith that doesn't clamp down on the real God in the flesh who was crucified in his body and then raised bodily on the third day is no faith at all. A faith that doesn't believe the apostles who said they saw the Lord with their own eyes is no faith at all. If the baby only sucks on a pacifier or a toy, then he isn't really eating. Faith is eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of Man. It is clinging to a real Jesus who is the real Son of the real Father who became a real man, truly suffered and died on a real cross, was buried in a real tomb, and rose again in that same, real body. His scars and piercings in his hands, feet, and side are real. He sits enthroned above all things with a body, which has the same nature as you and me.

So while you can't see this, it is important to know that others did see it. The saints and prophets from Adam and Eve to David and his descendants longed to see it. As Jesus said to his disciples, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it. (Luke 10:23-24)" To see Jesus, the Son of God in the flesh – to see his miracles, to witness his death and his resurrection – is a blessing beyond comparison. If the apostles did not see the risen Christ in his body, then our faith would be in vain. Just as a baby will starve unless his mother guides his mouth to the milk, our faith would be completely useless if Jesus did not appear to Thomas and the other apostles.

But it wasn't enough for Jesus merely to appear to them. He also sent them to talk about it so that you and I would believe what they saw with their own eyes. "These things are written," John says, "so that you would believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, and by believing have life in his name." The apostles seeing the risen Lord is inseparable from you hearing it. It isn't a myth meant only to decorate some kind of faith tradition. No, it is the very object of faith.

During the time of the Reformation, when the Lutherans were defending the teaching that sinners are declared righteous before God through faith alone, apart from any of their own works, they were accused of saying that someone can be saved even if he is living an evil life without any repentance. But they responded to this accusation by explaining what faith is. Faith, they said, is not a mere knowledge of history. Even the demons have this kind of faith. Even the unbelieving Jewish leaders couldn't deny

the fact that Jesus had risen from the dead. No, saving faith is much more than this. It is a special and particular faith. That is to say, it receives and embraces the specific promise of peace with God and the forgiveness of sins, which Jesus won by his obedience, suffering and death. The baby doesn't just know that his mother exists. But as his lips embrace the flow of milk, faith clamps down on the words of Jesus, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whenever you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven." Faith isn't merely a knowledge of the historical events of Jesus' death and resurrection. It is a firm trust in the promise, which the risen Christ gives to poor sinners.

About three hundred years after the Reformation, a philosopher in Berlin by the name of Georg Hegel imagined that he was being a good Lutheran when he said that faith is not a knowledge of history. He argued that the history of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is completely irrelevant to faith. Instead, he said that faith is to realize the union that already exists between God and man. To him, faith is to recognize how the Holy Spirit works through history to bring about progress in the future. Whether the previous events of history actually happened is no concern for faith. After all, doesn't the Bible say that we walk by faith and not by sight?

But despite how smart he was, Hegel was a fool. It's true that faith is not only a knowledge of history. But it still is a knowledge of history. Sure, we might not fully understand the history. A baby still has a lot to learn about his mother. But as surely as the baby is not drinking mythical milk, we are not trusting in a mythical Jesus. We walk by faith and not by sight, not because Jesus doesn't want us to see him. No, he promises that we will see him face to face just as his apostles saw him ascend into heaven. Until then, Jesus does not let our eyes see him, because he wants to strengthen our faith in his Word. He showed himself to the women, the apostles, and to hundreds of other so that our faith would stand on solid, historical, verifiable truth. And he keeps our eyes from seeing him for a time so that our faith would continue to rely on his promise.

Thomas did not sin because he wanted to see the risen Christ. It wasn't even because he insisted on seeing the risen Christ. No, he sinned because he refused to believe what his fellow apostles proclaimed to him until he himself put his hands into Jesus' side and his finger into the marks of the nails. He wouldn't believe their eye-witness testimony. He was not content simply to receive the crumbs that fall from the Master's table. So Jesus showed himself to Thomas, not because he was giving into Thomas' skeptical demands. No, he showed himself to Thomas so that Thomas would be a witness to us. He showed himself to Thomas so that we would believe the words of this apostle when he says, "My Lord and my God!"

This is why Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Blessed is Abraham who longed to see the day of Jesus but didn't get to see it in his life time. Blessed is Moses who wanted to see the face of God but at that time could only see his backside. Blessed is David who wrote in Psalm 27, "You have said, 'Seek my face.' My heart says, 'Your face, LORD, do I seek.'" Blessed are you who hear these words written down so many years ago, and the same Holy Spirit whom Jesus breathed out on his apostles creates and sustains faith in your heart. Jesus did many miracles. His disciples saw them. But these miracles – changing water into wine, healing the lame, the sick, and the blind, raising the dead, dying on the cross and bursting forth from the tomb – these are written down for you so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Such believing doesn't depend on your own seeing or understanding. But such believing is also not thoughtless. To know the peace we have with God in the risen Savior and the forgiveness of sins declared from his pierced body is to have the Holy Spirit. It is to have faith. It is a special and specific faith, resting in the promise of him who was delivered up for our offenses and raised again for our justification. As you grow in your understanding of his Word, you are growing up into the salvation with which God has already clothed you. And you can be confident that you will see him face to face.

In the meantime, you are nurtured in the church by the gospel and sacraments entrusted to her. She is your Alma Mater, your nourishing mother, to whom your Lord has given the keys to the kingdom of heaven. The words you hear in this place, from the font, the lectern, the pulpit, the altar, and from your fellow Christians in the pews – these are the very words of truth Christ gave to his church on earth, and they are just as true in heaven. Those who refuse to repent of their sins and get angry at the church are like grown children who only want sugar and empty calories. But like a newborn babe groans when he is hungry, your heart groans over the wickedness of your own sin. When you desire the pure spiritual milk of God's Word, you are blessed as much as if you saw the Lord Jesus with your own eyes. When you hear your pastor proclaim the words Jesus called him to proclaim, then you take comfort in these words of forgiveness, life, and peace from our risen Lord. And this is as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us himself. Surely you have tasted that the Lord is good. Amen.