Easter 2B 2012 (read only)

A respected French literary critic (Jacques Rivière) was once asked why he had stayed away from practicing his Catholic faith for so long. He didn’t put the blame on others; he didn’t for instance claim to have been bored by repetition, discouraged by poor preaching, angered by the sins of others or even loss of faith. No, he took responsibility for his absence and said: “It was because I preferred my aching hunger rather than being fed”. [We are familiar with the enigmatic utterances of the French – remember Eric Cantona’s reference to seagulls following trawlers?]

In other words Rivière was prepared to admit that he had for a long period chosen to starve his soul and spirit in order to feed his ego and assert his independence of spirit. This was his way of ensuring his place in with the world of elite French thinkers without the risk of losing respect among his literary peers for being a man of faith.

Rivière is no exception. Living a life of active faith has not been fashionable for years. For one thing, there is no way of guaranteeing whose company we will be in when we come to church. We come from different ethnic groups, we have different levels of income, we don’t all share the same political views and we don’t all support the same football team.

Being here has nothing to do with social aspiration; it does nothing to enhance our income; whereas in some circles it can actually harm our reputation when we live a life of faith.

All of which brings me to Thomas, one of my favourite apostles, because he tells it as he sees it. But Thomas is also the one who tried to go it alone rather than spend time with and trust the experience and faith of his companions. [If he couldn’t trust his friends how was he going to believe in the Resurrection?] Thomas had his own criterion for faith; it had to be based on his own experience rather than sharing the news first received by others. In other words he didn’t quite possess the humility that enables us pay close attention to the less obvious and subtle ways in which God’s love is made present in our midst.

Thankfully, for him and for us, Jesus did not treat Thomas’ egotism as a fatal flaw. Jesus did not cut Thomas off from the joy of the Resurrection on account of his pride. Instead he waited until Thomas was with those who could support his faith before challenging him to let go of his own way of judging things.

The context is important – for all we think about the gift of faith being something individuals have, authentic faith always draws us into community and community draws us into faithfulness. Faith like love, reminds us how we need one another. Eastertide is a season of faith and community. It begins with a reminder of our shared baptism and concludes with a reminder that it is the Holy Spirit who gathers and animates us as followers of Christ.

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