For Personal Reflection

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1. Of the three 'faults' cited by St. Francis de Sales, to which one can you relate the most? Why?
2. In what ways can you relate to St. Thomas?
3. What do you doubt? How do you doubt it? Why do you doubt it?
4. How is it that God can transform our faults into opportunities for forgiveness and conversion?
5. See how Jesus speaks to Thomas: in what ways do you need Jesus to speak to you in the same way?
6. Seeing is believing: how can I help others to believe in God based upon what others see in me?

Further Reading

Pulpit and Pew: A Study in Salesian Preaching. Vincent Kerns, MSFS. S.F.S. Printing School. India: Visakhapatnam, 1976.

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When Seeing...

SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

Is Believing

"Doubting Thomas."

An image—a moniker—that remains part of our language nearly two thousand years after the (in) famous post-Resurrection interaction between St. Thomas the Apostle and the risen Jesus.

We know by now that St. Francis de Sales drew upon many sources in order to proclaim the redeeming and transforming nature of God's love. No surprise, then, that the "Gentleman Saint" gleans some valuable insights and lessons from the life—and the most well-known moment—in the life of Thomas the Apostle.

"His first mistake was his failure to be present with the others. It is important to notice that no person achieves perfection in one leap, but bit by bit; similarly, no one falls from grace in a moment, but by little faults is led to greater."

In a sermon preached at the Visitation community in Lyons a week before his own death, St. Francis de Sales began: "Historians of our day, when they discuss famous people, have a habit of hiding the truth and drawing a veil over evil, making these authors far from trustworthy. By contrast, the Holy Spirit speaks the truth without fear or favor. It is the normal practice of holy Scripture to reveal quite frankly the grace sins of not a few very holy people. When the Spirit wishes to point to the forgiveness of Mary Magdalene, or to the tears of St. Peter, or to the conversion of St. Paul, for example, it recalls their faults before recognizing their repentance. It is the same with St. Matthew and others, especially St. Thomas."

Not to be too hard on "Doubting Thomas," Francis de Sales quickly reminds us that the "gravity of his fault only throws into even greater relief the infinite mercy of God compared to the unworthiness of sinners. Gods reigns in our wretchedness, so Scripture tells us."

Doubtless we can all relate!

So, the lessons to be gleaned from St. Thomas? "His *first* mistake was his failure to be present with the others. It is important to notice that no person achieves perfection in one leap, but bit by bit; similarly, no one falls from grace in a moment, but by little faults is led to greater. It is not for us to make light of being absent from the community at prayer or other exercises;

"God was not finished with Thomas. Because of God's boundless mercy, this doubting apostle got a second bite at the apple: Jesus appeared to Thomas, and "he placed his fingers into the sacred wounds of his Savior."

if St. Thomas had been with the other apostles, he would have been a saint and a believer eight days sooner. Don't think that a few days more or less make little difference: moments are precious, and we should hoard them."

His *second* mistake? "His refusal to believe when his companions told him: We have seen the Lord. He should have pressed the other apostles about the Savior's appearance, and rejoiced with them at their good fortune. The pity is that he did just the opposite, and even went so far as to refuse to admit that he was in the wrong anywhere. All of us share this fault: if we make a mistake, we are unwilling to admit it. The one who makes excuses is his or her own accuser…"

"When the Spirit wishes to point to the forgiveness of Mary Magdalene, or to the tears of St. Peter, or to the conversion of St. Paul, for example, it recalls their faults before recognizing their repentance...especially St. Thomas."

Third? Thomas "became stubborn and made wild, obstinate statements...St. Thomas was simply carried away by his passions: such behaviors, theologians tell us, can lead to mortal sin."

And yet, for all that, God was not finished with Thomas. Because of God's boundless mercy, this doubting apostle got a second bite at the apple: Jesus appeared to Thomas, and "he placed his fingers into the sacred wounds of his Savior."

And this one who had so strenuously doubted became a great herald of the Risen Christ...and was martyred for his faith.

Unlike Thomas, we need to take even more on faith: we don't have the same luxury that St. Thomas did insofar as he saw Jesus with his own eyes, both before and after Calvary. Nevertheless, for all our doubts or stubbornness we can nevertheless be transformed by the eyes of faith.

For many of us, seeing is, indeed, believing. May others believe in Jesus' love for them by what they see in us!