

Homily - A_ADV_03_2010
Delivered by Deacon Ron Tocci
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A man was on trial for murder. Even though the body was never found, there was strong evidence that he was guilty,..His lawyer decided he had to do something to plant some doubt in the jurors' minds....So, during his closing argument, he addressed the judge and jury: "Your honor,ladies and gentlemen of the jury...there's been a surprising development in the case."...He then turned and pointed to the courtroom door..."We have found the man my client is accused of killing, and in one minute he will walk through that door."...The judge and jurors were stunned and they all turned to look toward the door. ...A full minute passed and nothing happened....Finally the lawyer said, " Your honor, I apologize for making a false statement, but every juror looked toward that door expecting to see the alleged victim walk in...So, I must ask the jury to return a verdict of 'not guilty' since there was reasonable doubt in every juror's mind that anyone was actually murdered."...The jury then retired to deliberate. ...Within half-an-hour they returned to the courtroom and delivered a verdict of 'guilty.'.. The lawyer couldn't believe his ears... "How in the world could you find this man 'guilty' when everyone of you looked at that door and waited for the supposed dead man to walk in." ...The foreman of the jury spoke up: "You're right... Everyone of us did look at that door...But your client didn't."

Doubt...Our Gospel passage for this 3rd Sunday of Advent steered me to the topic of DOUBT.And that'll be my focus this morning...Now I'm willing to bet that most of us who've seriously thought about our faith – what it means to be a follower of Christ – have had from time to time some question, some issue, some doubt that troubled us...Let's see, how many of you have ever wrestled with doubts about your faith?...There you go...what a sorry bunch...Just kidding...My hand was up...just not very high.Truth is doubt is a spiritual virus that's been around for centuries...and we all carry this virus to some degree,...all of us, from the worst sinner to the saintliest saint...Just read about some of the great saints and you'll see that many of them struggled with doubt...We'll take a look at John the Baptist in a minute.So, the question isn't whether we will catch the doubt virus; the big question is how can we prevent it from eating away at our faith and driving us away from G....We'll deal with that in a minute too...Before that, though, I want to clear up some misconceptions we may have about doubt.

First can someone tell me what do you think is the opposite of faith?...We might think the opposite of faith is "doubt," but it isn't...The opposite of faith is "unbelief."...Faith is a belief that something is true....Unbelief says it's not true....Doubt is unsure if it's true or not....For example, if I doubt that Jesus rose from the dead,...I'm saying I'm not sure if He did or not...Something is keeping me from totally believing it...I've got some questions about it...Our Catholic faith asks us to believe a lot of things we can't see or prove, so I'm not surprised when people come to me – from pre-teens to octogenarians – who have doubts about one or more of them... Here are a few samples of what I have heard: *How do we know the Bible is really the Word of God?...Why would a loving God let so many people suffer, especially children?... I've prayed and prayed for help, but nothing's happened. Is there really someone there? ...How can God let bad things happen to good people while bad people get off easy?...I'm having a hard time believing that little piece of bread is actually the Body of Christ...*Now, I suspect these are the kinds of questions many of us wrestle with at times...Am I right?

Another misconception about doubt is that if we question something about our faith, God will not like it...Lots of times we think, "If I'm having doubts...something's wrong...something's bad. ...God's not happy with me...He may not forgive me."...But that's wrong. God doesn't condemn us when we question Him...We can see this in today's Gospel which recounts the time John the Baptist was in prison about to be executed...John had spent the last 3 yrs preparing the people

for the coming of the Messiah, and had pointed Jesus out as the “Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world.”...When he baptized Jesus, John had heard God’s voice from heaven thunder, “This is my beloved Son,”...so he knew Jesus HAD to be the Messiah....But while he was in prison, John had gotten reports of what Jesus was doing. ...and it wasn’t what he expected...John had preached about a Messiah. who would come as a fierce warrior to bring God’s judgment upon the earth,...vanquish the forces of evil and free Israel from Roman rule...Jesus was not that kind of Messiah.

And so doubts began to creep in...John must’ve thought: “If this Jesus is the Messiah,... why isn’t He acting like one? Have I made a mistake? Was all my hard work for nothing?”...He had to find out, so he sent two of his followers to ask Jesus: “Are you the one, or should we look for another?”...John’s situation reminds me of the time I was shopping for an anniversary card for my wife, and I came across a promising one. On the outside it said, “Honey, you’re the answer to my prayers.”...When I opened to the inside, it said, “You’re not exactly what I prayed for, but apparently you are the answer.”...OK....(Needless to say, I didn’t get that card...I value my life too much). This is kind of what was running through John’s mind...He and his people had hoped and prayed for a certain kind of Messiah., but didn’t get exactly what they prayed for.

So, when John’s messengers brought his question to Jesus: “Are you the one, or should we look for another?”, how did Jesus react?...Did He get upset?...Did He slam-dunk John for doubting Him?...No! Jesus tells the messengers to go back to John and report what they’ve seen and heard... all the good things they see Jesus doing for people, ...all the lives He is changing...all the evidence that shows Jesus is indeed the Messiah....Did Jesus think less of John after he had doubted Him?...In vs 28, Jesus says:” I say to you, among those born of women, there is none greater than John the Baptist.”...Think about that...Jesus gave John the highest praise at the same time John was questioning if Jesus was the real Messiah...and so, my friends, when we have doubts, questions, concerns, Jesus won’t think less of us...He won’t be up there shaking His head, “Those knuckleheads. They just don’t get it.”...He knows that for all believers - even the most loyal to Him, like John – there will be times and circumstances when doubts will creep in. He understands...

Ok, so when we are bitten by the doubt virus,...will it be damaging to our faith?...Yes, if our doubts are left unchecked, our faith can be devoured by the doubt virus...But if we deal with it in the right way, a dose of doubt can actually strengthen our faith...It’s like when we say if trouble doesn’t kill you, it can make you stronger...If you don’t let the doubt virus kill your faith, it can make it stronger...How do you do this? ...Well, when you’re hit with doubt, don’t let it fester and possibly get worse...Go and seek the truth, try to find answers if there are any...Investigate. What if a friend called you and said, “I just heard your name on the radio, and if you call the station you will win \$1000 in cash,” how would you react? Would you say, “You’re kidding. I don’t believe you,”..or, “I haven’t got time to call any radio station?”...I know what I’d do. I’d investigate. I’d call the station to see if it were true...When you have doubts, investigate!

Dig into your Bible...There’s a lot of answers there...Maybe join a Bible study group...Go to Jesus in prayer...Talk to Jesus one on one...Don’t text, don’t e-mail, don’t facebook Him...Talk to Jesus and ask Him to help you see the truth...Go to people of faith, people you respect. ...They’ve wrestled with their own doubts...Open up to them...Tell them what you’re unsure about,...and listen to what they have to say...All of us on the parish staff are here for you if you want to talk ,...and we can recommend reading material and other resources that can help you in your search...Think about joining a faith-sharing group like RENEW or Men’s Fellowship or Engaging Spirituality...Ask us about any of these.

My friends, here's the thing...It's OK for us to have doubts, to be unsure, to want to know more to help us fully believe...But we can't let our doubts fester and grow like an infected sore,...and they will because Satan is always looking for an opening...Jesus called Satan "the father of lies," and he whispers lies in our ears to draw us further and further away from God...We play into his hands when we fail to tend to our doubts...God isn't disappointed when we have doubts; He's disappointed when we don't deal with them and when we allow them to keep us from living the life He's planned for us.

OK, I'm guessing your biggest doubt this morning is whether or not I am going to ever stop talking,...so let me close with this...God wants us to have faith that can move mountains, because He knows that without faith we can't enjoy the full and abundant life His Son came to earth to offer us...As we continue our journey through this Advent season toward the celebration of His Son's coming, let this be our prayer: *Father, we can see and understand only a little about you now...but someday we hope to see you face to face and will see everything clearly...We have confidence in this because of what you have already revealed to us through your Son...Please do not let any doubts we have keep us from living as He showed us to live,...by loving you and loving all those you love. We pray this in Jesus' name. AMEN!*