

"No Doubt? No Faith!"
Homily of June 6, 2005
by Father Michael Dibble

There's a wonderful passage in the gospels about the man who has a kid who is very sick, back home. And the man comes to Our Lord and he says, "Help my kid. Come and heal my kid." And Our Lord says, "All things are possible to him who believes. Do you believe?" And the man says, "I believe. Help thou my unbelief." What a great prayer! I got a sick kid. I'm nervous. I'm worried. Don't try to gauge the depth of my faith right now. Don't give me a quiz! I believe.... Help my unbelief. Help my human doubts. And, of course, Our Lord does, heals the kid.

Now, in today's passage, the second reading, talking about Abraham and the Old Testament. It says here, "Abraham believed. Abraham did not weaken in faith." Abraham did not doubt. Abraham did not doubt. Abraham did not doubt. Now, I have a very mean little buzzard who flies in and lands on this shoulder. (It's a metaphor. It's a figure of speech.) But I've had this mean, invisible buzzard, this kind of mean spirit since I was eight years old. And, I read this passage out loud, the one about Abraham, no doubt. And my buzzard whispered in my ear, last week, "Good for you, Abie Baby..." No doubt? No doubt, didn't waver. Now, my buzzard is obviously juvenile in the worst sense, blasphemous, nasty, tries to shake me up. Luckily, then, there flies in an eagle from the Lord. (These are just metaphors. Don't call the shrink!) And the eagle, the BALD eagle, flies in and the eagle says, "Peace... easy does it." The buzzard tries to shake maybe some of us, not just me, tries to shake us up. "... Got a doubt? Good! Buzz it!" In other words, "Worry; be anxious; be tense; don't try to resolve it. Just be unhappy. Doubt! Buzz it!" And the eagle, the good spirit, "Peace. Easy does it."

I want to talk a little bit, with your help today, a little bit about doubt. I don't think too many people toss and turn all night with doubts about the Trinity. It's hard to understand, but I don't think we're in anguish about the Trinity. Doubts plague us more about other things, more concrete worries and troubles. And three of them that I picked out for today are: Are the gospels true? Is that whole stuff about Jesus and everything else.... Is it true? And the next is human pain and suffering.... Why? And finally, if you have doubts, you must be worthless. And the buzzard loves to say, "You got a doubt? ... Good! Buzz it! Worry! Throw your hands up."

Are the gospels true? I list this first, as you are probably awful weary of hearing, because I was a teacher for thirty years, of high school and college. And by senior year, high school kids (And I loved those kids. They were great!)... But, you know, they'd ask questions.... questions.... doubts. "Are the gospels true or are they just kind of made up?" "Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, they are very pretty. We've heard it since we were kids. Maybe...." OK. You've got a doubt? Buzz it!

The eagle says, "Peace. Easy does it." There is more research, empirical evidence in the past two hundred years and even in my lifetime about the existence, the historical validity and veracity of the four gospels. They've done more research on Jesus Christ than Cleopatra, Marc Antony, Alexander the Great and all those guys put together because he's the most important person in civilization. And for two hundred years a lot of people have been trying to disprove he ever lived. And the other group, wanting to believe, have gone ahead and researched. The research.... There is no scholar worth his soul today that denies the validity of the gospels, the historicity. They happened. There was a Jesus who said what he said. He did what he is reputed to have done, and most scholars agree that he must have risen. I'm not talking Catholics. I'm talking scholars. And there are so many books about it. Have you seen Barnes and Noble's or Borders' book shelves, just on religion? If you had faulty brakes, or a microwave that didn't work or a children's toy that you wondered it looks a little dangerous, you'd get some answers. Well, your faith is certainly worth a look at some book defending the faith, by genuine scholars. (Speaking of faulty brakes, some of you have been so kind about giving me rides to Mass or to the store. But, on several occasions, the driver has said, as we are driving, "Oh, there's something wrong with these brakes!" giving me enormous doubts. Don't tell me!) But, if about material things we want to get some research done, why not about the faith? If you are really plagued by that buzzard, it's worth a little research. You'll be happy to find out how solid our faith is.

Number two, suffering: I beat this one to death, I know. Personally when I am talking about why pain, human error... Couldn't we have just frolicked in the garden, au natural, and then been ushered right into heaven? And, of course, the answer is free will. God has given human creatures the freedom to choose, which is very irritating. It brings in a lot of trouble. But, even in human love, you don't want robotized love. I have read in books it is better when the person really loves you really loves you, not a marionette. God doesn't want marionettes, and so we have freedom of will and we can mess up, hurt each other. It's a yellow brick road for some of us. You know Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, ... this way.... or this way? I can never remember. I can't understand why you wouldn't choose personal opinion, out and out, arrogant atheism, because then everything clicks into place: despair, misery. The whole thing is a sad sick joke. Let's have some fun. OR Christ, and Christ without the cross is meaningless.... watered down Christ, who wants it?

I was once whining in confession on the East Coast, whining about something. And the old Jesuit priest said, "Hey, look, Bud! Christ didn't sell us a bill of goods... He laid it on the line. Take up your cross and follow me. I've prepared a mansion for you. Hang on!" Anyhow, that's the eagle, "Peace. Easy does it." But decide, one way or the other, and then cling to it. Christ didn't sell us a bill of goods. There is a lady in New York City who has an Irish-British accent. (Oh, I loved her accent!) Anyhow, she had been out to see Mother Teresa several summers before Mother Teresa died. And, on one occasion (She has written a book about it, this lady, Lorna.)... She's an auctioneer at Sotheby's. She sat down one summer with Mother Teresa one day. Old Mother Teresa was very sick and old... Lorna said, "I want to discuss some of the many metaphysical conundra, puzzles in Catholic doctrine...." She went on. Mother Teresa listened patiently, and finally Mother Teresa said, "Oh, Lorna. You're a Catholic. Go in and wrap some bandages." Well that sounds rather simplistic. I don't know. I think it's sublime. You're a Catholic, and having doubts is part of your Catholic faith.

Of course, but after awhile, there are some things that won't be resolved on this planet. Would you help resolve the problem that the lepers need some bandages clean. Oh, Lorna you're a Catholic...

And finally, the buzzard ("You got to doubt. Buzz it! Worry...!") hops on a different set, like a versatile evil actor, and the buzzard says to some of us, "You have doubts? What kind of a Catholic are you? Trashy! It must be your moral failings that bring on these doubts. And it is despicable that you have doubts, doubting the Lord, you miserable transcendent piece of trash.... blah.... blah.... blah." The eagle says, "Peace. Easy does it. Yes, you have doubts. You have a human fallible brain, a human fallible heart."

Here is the Catechism of the Catholic Church (holding up a book). Right on the cover, "Fully approved by Pope John Paul II." It's not some hip, left-wing, watered-down liberal approach. And I looked up "doubt" in the index. It is really good reading. It is not boring. "There are two kinds of doubt, voluntary and involuntary. This is voluntary doubt: "I'm going to sit here and doubt. I'm not going to the barbecue. Cancel the swimming. I just want to sit here and doubt." Well, that is so silly. It's voluntary doubt, concocting problems, and that could be a sin. The catechism reassures us. But involuntary is utterly sinless. It's bred of anxiety and nerves and a human fallible brain, the cerebral cortex, looking at the doctrines, the mysteries of the Faith.Of course, there are doubts.

I had a kid my first year of teaching, a senior, sitting in the back, religion class, nine months. Oh, he was tough! OH! "Hey, Father, what about.... Can you explain... Is there any empirical evidence..." Very bright, he wasn't a brat. He wasn't. He wasn't a show-off. I went through such hell with that kid. I used to prepare for that class as if I were taking my finals at NYU. He was a quarterback, which further intimidated me! ... I still hear from him. He graduated in '65. I still hear from him, one of the few from that class. Very convinced Catholic, bringing his kids up Catholic, probably still asking questions, but great faith! And finally, Our Lord on the cross, suffocating to death... (According to the scholars that is how Our Lord basically died. He couldn't breathe. He kept lifting himself up to relieve the pain, and down to relieve the pain.) Remember how Christ, towards the very end, cries out, "God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" He wasn't acting. He wasn't conning us. He wanted to experience the absolute, infinite desolation of that kind of doubt, so he would know exactly how you and I might feel sometimes. And at the end, "I commend my spirit to you, Father."

The last example is Louis Pasteur, from whom we get pasteurized milk, a great scientist, a great Catholic, profoundly intelligent Catholic. One day, somebody said to Louis Pasteur, "I wish I had the faith of a little child." And Pasteur said, "Why? Sounds silly. A, you're an adult. You're not a child. B, as long as you have the suffering of doubts, you will continue to search. You will continue to pray. You'll continue to stretch out for his hand."

And, the last warning, that I've gotten in my life is sometimes to assert you have absolute infallible doubt can be putting you in an awfully startling, embarrassing position. A quick parenthetical example, NO DOUBT: I babysit two little kids on the property of the doctors on whose property I freeload. I pay my rent by babysitting these little kids. There are three but I babysit the four-year-old

and the six-year-old, and they have gotten to know my Irish terrier. Quite recently, they said to me, "Mike, we love Dinny." (That's the dog.) "And can we have Dinny?" And I said, "I have no doubt that when I pass on, your parents would be glad for you to have Dinny." And they said, "Oh?" And I said, "Yes, I have absolutely no doubt that you'll get Dinny when I die." And they said, in stereo, "We can't wait!!"That's what you get for not doubting.

We are at Mass now, a relatively tranquil time on a Sunday morning, relatively tranquil, with the eagle saying, "Peace. Easy does it." So, if you happen to have somebody flapping on your shoulder, just say, "I'm at Mass. I'm with the Lord. Buzz off!!"