

Second Sunday of Easter 2016/Year C
Acts 5:27-32/Revelation 1:4-8/John 20:19-31
St. Augustine's
Candace Galik

LIFT OFF

I was never bothered by Thomas' doubts. It is, after all, hard to condemn someone for refusing to accept a situation that never existed before. Not much different than my grandfather, born and raised in 19th century Russia. In his world, transportation was mostly by foot. Few traveled for fun-filled adventures. The only reason many left home was because they were forced to start a new life.

It was no surprise, therefore, that when the first person was launched into space on April 12, 1961, my grandfather thought it absurd. Cars were bad enough, serving no purpose in his mind except as yet another instrument of death, and as for space travel -- so pointless, and thoroughly unbelievable. Furthermore, given that it was Yuri Gagarin, a Russian, only bolstered his case.

"You can never believe the Communists," he said.

Twenty-three days later, it happened again. Alan Shepherd became the first American to leave Earth. My grandfather still wasn't convinced.

"What about the pictures on TV?" I asked, a young child completely enthralled with this new adventure.

"Disney did it," he replied. "Like Donald Duck."

Just another fantasy, in his mind, or another political trick, and the third possibility -- that this actually happened -- was impossible.

But I was born into a different world, where progress was the new religion and what was an unbelievable event for my grandfather was an easily accepted truth for me.

So let's not hold Thomas' feet to the fire for his doubts. Perfectly reasonable.

What troubles me, always has, is Thomas' request. His way to banish doubt.

He wants to see the sign of the nails in Jesus' hands. He wants to put his fingers there. He wants to insert his hands in the wounds of Jesus' side.

There is no polite way to put this. He then gropes Jesus. Alive or dead, this is inappropriate contact. The other disciples had better manners. For Mary, having her name called was enough. For Cleopas and another disciple, their eyes were opened while at table, in the breaking of the bread. For Peter and others, it was while they were at work, in the catching of 153 fish. They showed restraint. They were the Episcopalians.

But I'm sure that my grandfather would have not been satisfied with what he would have called rather lame explanations of an unprecedented event. So what if Mary cried at discovering the gardener wasn't who he seemed or a stranger suddenly appeared as a beloved dead friend. Repeated arguments by those who said, "But I saw the lift-off with my own eyes!" would have left him cold.

He would have needed to see the damage, as Thomas did. He would have needed proof that the space capsule had some mark on it. Maybe re-entry burn marks he could touch. Or a broken knob or two from the turbulence. Or, maybe, assurance from Alan Shepherd that yes, he truly left, and he truly returned. Of course, my grandfather was still free to believe that none of this was adequate proof. It could still be the work of

Disney, or even Donald Duck. And he definitely would have needed to consume more than a tubful of vodka to believe anything Yuri Gargarin said.

It comes down to trust. Trusting the person, trusting the evidence, trusting the sign. And trusting in a wisdom, a presence, a God, that some see, some feel, and some are quiet enough to know.

Mary and Cleopas and Peter saw one kind of sign. The sweet sign of the Risen Christ, the one that, frankly, makes belief easy. Makes it comforting. In the calling of our name, giving us relief that makes us weep. At the table, laughing and sharing a feast. Or while at work, or traveling on a road (or a ferry). And in blood red sunsets, fine wine, moments with those we love. The Divine Presence in the ordinary, lighting up the world with infinite beauty.

And then there is Thomas' experience. I called it groping which, I know, was at Jesus' explicit invitation. Which had its reasons, without a doubt.

Was Jesus saying: "Look at me. I'm bleeding, I'm broken, I hurt all over. And one more thing -- I'm dead."

This isn't Jesus the Beautiful.

Or was Jesus saying: "Touch my suffering, and you will find life."

This is Jesus the Saviour.

As an Easter people, we touch the wounds and embrace the suffering. Yes, we are bleeding and broken and there are days when we either can't or won't get out of bed; yes, in life there is suffering. But in suffering there is life.

Thomas touched. And then he left home to start a new life. He sailed to India. There he established the first Christian communities. He covered a distance of approximately 3,000 miles in a boat that I can't imagine, surely not a cruise ship. For that time, it was almost as much of an extraordinary achievement as flying into space.

It was in touching suffering that Thomas found his new life. May it be that in Christ Risen that we find ours.

And the people say...

