

Third Sunday of Easter, April 26, 2009, Year B

**St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector    Scripture: Luke 24: 36b-48

***“Sight Unseen”***

The young son of a Pastor was told by his mother to wash his hands because there are germs living in all that dirt. He refused and complained “Germs and Jesus!” “Germs and Jesus!” That’s all I ever hear around this house – **and I’ve never seen either one!**

I cannot help but keep remembering the line from the movie “The Santa Clause” where Judy, the young elf proclaims – “Seeing is believing, but BELIEVING is SEEING!”

In today’s Holy Gospel, Jesus appeared in the midst of the Apostles – showing them His nail torn hands and His feet – and still they couldn’t believe what they were seeing – Scripture says it was because of their joy and amazement. The risen Jesus was right in front of them and they still doubted. Wow! Jesus of Nazareth, who had been killed – crucified –, was standing right in front of them – but they still doubted. Seeing is NOT always believing!

Jesus appeared to them a second time – and this time Thomas was there with them. Jesus told His disciples in John 20:29 *"Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."* Even after this – Jesus appeared to the disciples yet again at Tabgha, on the Sea of Galilee – and none of them recognized Him until John said *"It is the Lord."* (John 21:7) They fellowshiped and dined with Him but still were unsure. Even before Jesus ascended to the Father – when He gave the world His Great Commission – Matthew tells us *"When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful."* (Matthew 28:17)

Jesus was right in front of them – risen from the dead – yet they were lacking what they desperately needed to truly believe. It would not be until the Day of Pentecost that the promised Counselor and Comforter – the Holy Spirit, would descend upon them and *"appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance."* (Acts 2:3-4) Filled with boldness that none of them had known before – they then brought to the world everything that they had seen and heard, filled with the assurance that it was all true. They had no more doubt – for it had been removed and that hole that had been in their lives was now filled with the Holy Spirit. Now they would truly serve the Lord – as was evidenced by what Peter said about Jesus of Nazareth when he addressed the men of Jerusalem that very day – *"God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power."* (Acts 2:24) He called upon them to believe and to repent of their sins and receive Jesus into their hearts, and that day three thousand “received his Word” (Acts 2:41) and were baptized into the fellowship of believers.

That, my friends, was just the beginning! Let me ask you – how could a group of cowering, scared men who were in hiding, suddenly change their demeanor and total outlook? Hadn’t these men lived with Jesus for three years – witnessing everything He said and did? The difference was simply through the power of the Holy Spirit – these men and the ones who would follow in their footsteps, now had the capability to believe what they did not see – or if you will – “sight unseen.” The author of Hebrews reminds us that *"without faith it is impossible to please Him."* Instead, we need to come to God believing *"that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."* (Heb. 11:6) Sight unseen!

Third Sunday of Easter, April 26, 2009, Year B

It wasn't until the Holy Spirit brought His power and understanding to the disciples and their followers – that it could be, understood why Jesus went to the cross and to even comprehend that the nails that pierced His hands and feet were indeed meant for each one of us! The Blessed Holy Spirit gives us the peace, confidence, and knowledge that He is with us and that just as the Disciples went forth in the power of the Holy Spirit – so can we, filled with the power of faith that can heal sickness – physically, emotionally and spiritually, change hearts, and bring others the Truth –all in the Name of Jesus.

Today at the 9:15 and 11 AM services, we will be witnessing the baptism of 3 young children. Thanks be to God – His Holy Spirit will fill these children –and strengthen them – while their parents and Godparents will make promises to guide and instruct them in the light of Holy Scripture and of Jesus Christ, Our Lord. They will stand and renounce Satan – and let me tell you – because of that – he is not happy. We will re-affirm our faith – vowing to persevere in resisting evil – and promise to proclaim – in word and deed – the Good News of God in Christ. There is a war going on – and it is not one that we can always see - but we need to trust and obey - sight unseen - that Jesus – who promised He would be with us always – in the form of His Holy Spirit – will lead us and guide through the time of trial – and that we will be victorious over it through Him – who gives us the victory!

Our bishop, Bill Atwood is in Africa as we speak and in his words there is much going on – much of which cannot be seen. He says that there is *“Huge spiritual warfare. Sunday, I preached at a street corner with a giant PA system at the "Matatu Church" for van drivers and their touts. It was pretty wild. It is an area where the "Mungiki" are very strong (Kenyan gang like the Mafia). There was huge darkness so I preached on the resurrection bringing light into the darkness. Amazing, when I was giving an invitation to surrender to Christ, one of the Matatu's with a giant air horn just sat on the horn. The PA system was so **huge it was able to overcome the horn**, but it was really something.”*

Let me tell you about the fiasco the Bishop had with his Kenyan Cell Phone: he said *“I tried to pay money into the account and they kept not being able to accept money. They said credit card (two different ones) declined. I was finally able to work it out to get money into the account. When I called both credit card companies they said there were no problems with the account and they did not even show attempts at charges. THEN, after the money was finally credited to the account, instead of crediting the account, some clerk pushed the wrong button and turned the entire account off. **I had to travel across town to the central office a second time today to get it turned back on.** While I was standing there I was praying and declaring in the Spirit "The Abundant Life of Christ" reigns here and with my account.”*

The Lord gave the bishop patience throughout the whole ordeal. He says: *“In the process the guy there told me he was going through a really rough time so I prayed with him. He called to thank me and said how huge it was. The Lord was certainly in that. After my phone was working again I got a text message saying there was a problem with my account and I would have to go in tomorrow to make another payment. The phone is still working though, even though they said it was turned off again.*

There clearly is something afoot – something that we cannot see. The enemy tries whatever he can to thwart effective ministry and to throw you off guard and track. If he can get a foothold – he will try to turn it into a stronghold! We need to stand against this stuff (and that is about all I can call it – *stuff*) – and gain the courage that the battle is not ours – it belongs to the Lord!

Third Sunday of Easter, April 26, 2009, Year B

There is indeed a battle going on – and the souls of all of humanity are the prizes! We are called to stay strong in our faith and to call upon the Lord and His holy angels to protect us and those who seek Him. Faith – sight unseen!

If you think the story is over – think again! The Bishop is still running into more. He says: *“My friend who arrived Monday night from Dallas to do work on water purification and bottling installations here arrived, but the equipment did not make it. We are adding two more systems in addition to the two that we already did. He arrived OK, but the airline has lost the two new filter/purification machines. We really need them so he can install them since he is only here for a few days. As of tonight, the equipment that is supposed to be installed this week (more water purification parts) is still sitting in London. It was supposed to come Monday and then today, and now maybe tomorrow!”* These are not coincidences – they are pure and simple schemes of the enemy to try and thwart the believers in our efforts to build the Kingdom of God.

Bishop Atwood concludes by saying: *“I really appreciate your joining me in prayers. **Please pray for the Lord's victory, for communications to work, and for all aspects of provision---for the "abundant life of Christ" to be manifest!**”*

As I said before – the victory and the battle are the Lord’s – we need to be in prayer - certain that we will hear the wonderful testimony from the Bishop when he returns here on May 30 for another Healing Service at 3 PM, and to celebrate Holy Confirmation with us on May 31.

We can be confident that the Lord will see us through – when we let Him fight the battle – and recognize that fact – getting out of the way – and onto our knees to let God be God! Our friends from Petra have a song that certainly fits – “Get on your knees and fight like a man!”

St. Paul reminds us in these words from his letter to the Romans, and I would ask you to turn to page 1133 in your pew Bibles – to Romans 8:37-39. Together, would you please pray them with me: *“But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 8:37-39) Amen.